How to Identify and Drive the Right Motivators Within Your Organization

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Ask any construction leader what they think the most common reason for employee flight is and you will hear a common refrain: money. Between being amid an employee-driven market and within an industry that historically has landed in the lower tiers of attractiveness among younger entry-level workers, it is easy to see how leaders might garner this impression.

When an employee puts in their two weeks' notice, and the leaders asks, "Why are you leaving?" The knee-jerk answer is usually something like, "I'm going to Brand X to make a few more dollars." Hardly a controversial subject and certainly one that we can all relate to.

However, most studies show that employees often leave for a more personal reason: the relationship with their immediate supervisor. A manager may have a different view of this conversation when they hear they are the reason an employee is leaving.

However, it's regularly taught that employees and managers alike should "leave on a high note" or "never burn a bridge," so the safe response comes back to money.

Employee flight is not a concern that's exclusive to the construction industry. In fact, right now all industries are dealing with the ramifications of the "Great Resignation." As if macroeconomic forces weren't already wreaking havoc on project costs, wage increases are providing another factor that must be considered. However, is it shortsighted to think that money is the ultimate motivator?

There is no question that businesses are actively recruiting and, in some cases, offering obscene salaries and compensation packages to some candidates, which makes it hard to compete against.

That said, there are also other factors that must be considered by all firms.

The following list is a summary of drivers that provide motivation to associates:

» Achievement — Seeing favorable results of one's work for the client

» Recognition — Attention or praise for successful work

» Work itself — Nature of the work (varied, challenging, or interesting)

» Responsibility — Empowerment over projects or business units

» Advancement — Promotion in rank within organization

» Total compensation — Total salary, bonuses, and benefits

» Growth — Opportunity to rise in ranks within the company or enhance skills through development

» Relationships — Interactions with peers, supervisors, others

» Status — Pleasure derived from position or stature in organization

» Job security — Stability of job, low fear of loss of work

While, undoubtedly, there are other themes, this list must be force-ranked. Forced ranking is the controversial process by which employees are graded against each other instead of judged against performance standards.

For instance, ask each employee to develop their own list of priorities. Then compile a companywide average and compare this list to your own beliefs. How far apart are your views from your own employees' perspectives?

Now What?

First, it is highly unlikely that every person within an organization has identical motivation. There is always one person who receives satisfaction from promotions and another who receives more motivation through simple verbal affirmation. This proves one thing: Management of a team is not a one-size fits all concept. If compensation is used as the primary, or potentially the only, carrot you can dangle, you may be missing the mark for a large part of your team. Becoming a superior employer requires a multipronged approach. For instance, assume the top five force-ranked drivers from the group average is this:

1. Advancement

2. Recognition

3. Total compensation

4. Growth

5. Relationships

Based on this feedback, the firm's response might involve these specific strategies and tactics:

ADVANCEMENT:

» What do career paths look like for both office and field associates?

» What type of internal development is provided to allow associates to move forward?

» What feedback process is in place to guide associates in their career?

RECOGNITION:

» How well does your team "catch" people doing something right?

» Is there a formal mechanism in place to provide nonmonetary rewards?

» How do you balance individual recognition and team recognition?

TOTAL COMPENSATION:

» What is the firm's overall compensation strategy? (i.e., "We want to be in the 85% quartile of total compensation.")

» Is your performance compensation defined for the associates?

» How does it balance the reward for both individual performance and team performance?

» How do you manage expectations when times are good and when the market is down?

GROWTH:

» What is the organization's response to training?

» What is the organization's response to individual development?

» How is the training and development administered?

» How practical is the training?

RELATIONSHIPS:

» What is the internal culture the firm is striving to achieve?

» How does culture promote positive relationships across the business?

» What are the barriers to strong relationships?

Of course, there will be overlap in these categories. For example, it is easy to see the potential intersection of training and development with internal career-pathing. Put another way: This does not have to result in eight to 10 different strategic initiatives, but, rather, a comprehensive talent-focused solution to maintain the right culture within the organization.

There is no single strategic response to the talent crisis facing both the industry and the country. Years from now, there will be plenty of armchair quarterbacks who will mystically have the solution in-hand, all from the benefit of hindsight, of course. Leaders today must constantly take the temperature of their organization to ensure they are playing offense effectively.

About the Author

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