



Book Finding and Keeping Great Employees

Jim Harris and Joan Brannick
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Recommendation

Job seekers and job holders alike tend to think they're National Football League free-agents when it comes to getting and keeping jobs in this low unemployment era. Thus, corporations can find it very tempting to act like football teams - throw money at recruits, throw money at employees with wanderlust - and then throw up their hands when people leave. No need for all that, say authors Jim Harris and Joan Brannick. Finding and keeping great employees isn't about winning the bidding, it's about getting to the source of employee alienation and rebuilding connections among people, their jobs, their lives and your company. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to employees, especially unhappy ones, and to human resources professionals of all stripes, from recruiters to compensation analysts to development specialists, and even football coaches.

Take-Aways

- The biggest obstacle to finding and maintaining the most talented workforce is lack of connection between employees and their companies, jobs and personal values.
- Successful recruitment and retention requires aligning your employment efforts with your organizational culture.
- Pursue a culture driven by customer service, innovation, operational excellence or spirit.
- Aligned companies use eight recruitment strategies and eight retention strategies.
- Inventory your staffing practices and prioritize your efforts.
- Obtain employee feedback on your current alignment and proposed efforts.
- Develop initiatives to improve alignment.
- Pilot test these initiatives on a staggered schedule, and then implement fully.
- Monitor your alignment continually.
- Re-evaluate your core culture and employment policies whenever your organization undergoes a structural change.

Summary

Disconnection and Alignment

Push someone hard through a revolving door, and they are likely to end up where they started - on the outside looking in. Despite lavish recruiting programs and gargantuan signing bonuses, companies are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain outstanding employees. However, this is not an inevitable consequence of a tight labor market. Many companies achieve low turnover, even in this competitive employment climate. They succeed because they really understand why employees' eyes tend to wander: disconnection and lack of alignment.

“Aon Consulting, a unit of the Chicago-based Aon Insurance company, found that 55% of workers said they would switch jobs for a pay increase of 20% or less.” [St. Petersburg Times, Feb. 8, 1998.]

During the 1980s and 1990s, a time called "the most turbulent in business history," corporate success became dramatically unhinged from employee well being. Three realms of employee disconnection developed. "Company disconnection" arose in the wake of downsizing programs that reshaped the once traditional long-term connection between company and employee. Believing their jobs could disappear at any moment, employees became sanguine about disappearing themselves. "Job disconnection" resulted from greater strategic flexibility and dizzying technological advancement. Employees who did not get continual training saw the gulf between their skills and their job duties widen dangerously before their eyes. Finally, long hours of unfulfilling work became a recipe for "personal disconnection" between employees' jobs and their values, such as family ties and societal contributions.

“Employees disconnect on three levels: company, job and personal. To find and keep outstanding employees, organizations must overcome this growing chasm of disconnection or risk losing long-term competitive advantage.”

Companies need to understand that turnover is fundamentally a disconnection problem so they can recognize that they need to build a strong, stable and lasting consciousness of connection for both prospective and current employees. This connection is not to a lifetime with the company. Rather, it unites employer and employee in a shared core culture. By understanding the concept of core culture, embracing one culture over all others, and tailoring recruiting, screening, promotion, and retention programs to promote that culture, ordinary companies can become aligned companies.

How Companies Benefit from Alignment

Alignment gives companies several competitive advantages.

- Strategy - Aligned companies meet strategic goals more easily because staffing and retention programs maintain a strategically motivated workforce.
- Simplicity - Alignment offers clear cultural criteria for hiring, promotion and retention.
- Reinforcement - People with common cultural values reinforce their organization's core culture through the decisions they make.
- Company connection - Aligned companies connect to their employees through the common values they share.
- Job connection - Alignment links all jobs to the core culture and helps employees see the connection between individual professional duties and the company's overall goals.
- Personal connection - When employees share their companies' values, they perceive hard work as a means of promoting their beliefs.
- Talent center - When your staff can achieve peak performance without having to surmount cultural obstacles, you will find it easier to maintain a pool of talent.

The Four Core Cultures

Aligned companies possess and cultivate one of four core cultures in their staffing and retention programs, recognizing that "financial performance is a result or an outcome, not a driver, of organizational excellence."

1. Customer-service culture - This culture strives above all to "create solutions to meet customer needs." Customer-service organizations put customers' needs before their own. They empower frontline employees to solve customers' problems on the fly. Customer-service organizations frequently cultivate customer contact at every organizational level. Their greatest challenge

is inculcating the service culture in their customers, which sometimes requires diverting resources.

2. Innovation-driven culture - This approach is characterized by a passion to "create and shape the future" - and to do so better and more quickly than the competition. Innovation-driven organizations develop new products and services as quickly as they can, constantly cannibalizing their latest and greatest to create something newer and better. These companies cultivate a sense of adventure and pushing the limits, giving employees the freedom to take their intelligence and creativity as far as they can.
3. Operational excellence - This culture tries "to create processes that minimize costs while maximizing productivity and efficiency." These companies relentlessly pursue quality. While they abhor waste and ferret out any process bottlenecks, they make enormous investments in improving procedures. Operational excellence demands as much standardization as possible, creating clear performance guidelines at every level.
4. Spirit-driven culture - These companies are "obsessed with creating environments that unleash the limitless creativity, enthusiasm and energy of people." These companies focus on employees, social causes or even religion as their employees' primary motivators. They foster a managerial attitude of service, a sense among employees that their individual jobs promote a greater good and a commitment to promoting more than just the bottom line, even in situations that test the company-employee bond.

Staffing

The staffing process involves all aspects of the recruitment and selection of potential employees. In particular, the staffing function requires job definition, job marketing, candidate screening and hiring. Aligned companies pursue eight staffing "best practices."

1. The "WOW" factor - Aligned companies know what makes them unique relative to the competition, or what Tom Peters describes as "stepping out and standing out from the growing crowds of look-alikes." These companies know how to communicate their uniqueness by incorporating culture into recruitment and screening processes.
2. Treat applicants as customers - Aligned companies invest significant resources in understanding the qualities and characteristics of ideal applicants, communicate a consistent message to applicants and customers and do everything possible to give applicants a positive experience, even when they have to reject a candidate.
3. Cultivate a leadership image - Aligned companies create images as community leaders and industry experts. These firms cultivate a strong reputation in relevant industries and support local, regional and nationwide initiatives for social causes.
4. Get real - Aligned companies are able to convey the positive and negative aspects of working for them.
5. Job or no job - Aligned companies pounce on talented people, whether or not there is a specific opening at the moment.
6. Multiplicity - Aligned companies recruit with multiple methods, involving multiple people and departments. Interviewers introduce recruits to their prospective colleagues.
7. Great-employee profile - In addition to understanding what knowledge, skills and abilities the ideal employee will have, aligned companies know the characteristics of employees who fit the organization culturally and pursue candidates with those traits.
8. Beyond benchmarking - Aligned companies learn the status quo by tracking and measuring organizational performance. They collect and analyze staffing metrics, so they know what is working and what is not. Important metrics include the cost per hire, monthly or annual turnover rates by position and department, relative use of different recruiting sources, average time to fill a position and the quality of employees hired using each method. This information helps firms improve the staffing function.

Retention

Aligned companies pursue eight "best practices" to retain employees. This is critical because, "the occupational half-life in 1970 was estimated at somewhere between 12 and 15 years. Frighteningly, according to the Federal Department of Labor, today's best estimates of occupational half-life are in the range of 30 to 36 months."

1. Engage the soul - Pursue ways to engage employees' hearts and souls.
2. What gets rewarded gets done - Match rewards to activities that promote core cultural values.
3. More than money - Embrace intangible benefits above and beyond competitive pay and traditional benefit plans.
4. Learning drives earning - Invest in training employees and make learning an integral part of the core culture.
5. Get a life - Help employees balance their work with their personal lives.
6. In the loop - Connect employees' individual duties with the organization's big goals.
7. Lighten up - The company should take your work extremely seriously, while taking itself not so seriously.
8. Free at last - Give employees the maximum operational freedom possible.

Getting Started

Using a six-step process, you can help your company become better aligned.

1. Clearly embrace one core culture - This is your most important task because it sets the standard to which your other cultures will be aligned. This is also your most difficult task because it requires extreme honesty, enough to deconstruct your company's mission or vision statements if necessary. You may even determine that your company's current core culture does not support its long-term, strategic objectives. In that case, you will have to battle to realign your company's culture and its mission.
2. Prioritize your alignment efforts - Find two or three examples of how your organization implements each of the eight staffing best practices and each of the retention best practices. Based on these lists, identify your strengths and weaknesses, and identify ways to leverage your strengths and implement new initiatives or improvements where needed.
3. Obtain employee feedback on alignment - To get the maximum number of perspectives and the best chance of full participation and support, involve employees from all levels and divisions of your organization. Determine which of your current staffing and retention programs are best aligned with the company's core culture and decide how to align those that are not. Discover and cure any organizational barriers to alignment. Determine who should be involved at various points in the alignment process, and strategize the best ways to monitor and evaluate the new programs.
4. Create alignment initiatives - Use the employee feedback to re-tool current staffing and retention initiatives and to develop new ones. Involve representatives from all parts of the company.
5. Implement alignment initiatives - This is an ongoing process, and it works best when you can test and refine any new initiative. Generally, you want to stagger implementation of new staffing and retention initiatives over time.

“To have a fully-aligned staffing function, you must measure what you currently do and use that information to revise and improve. Measurement is the key for keeping and improving staffing practices that consistently attract culturally aligned top talent.”

Monitor and evaluate alignment initiatives - Effective alignment is an ongoing process. New staffing and retention initiatives must be evaluated regularly, and changes should be made accordingly. Also, any change in the organizational structure - such as a merger, acquisition or change in executive leadership - may result in a change in the company's core purpose, and require a shift in core culture and therefore a shift in staffing and retention to re-align to the new protocol.

About the Authors

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