

Retention: “Tip Sheet”

There are some important steps in planning and implementing a retention strategy, versus just reacting to high turnover:

Planning

1. Determine what skills and experiences you need (link staffing to the agency strategy).
2. Determine where you can find these folks in the labor market (recruitment targeting).
3. Determine what motivates your target employee types (e.g. newly-degreed MSWs) to choose their employer (workforce research and segmentation; attribute analysis*).
4. Determine how your agency can differentiate itself from the competition by focusing on 8-10 attributes for which you can be strong (competitive analysis; positioning).
5. Determine what you minimally have to do on all attributes that are important to your target employee types (eliminate demotivators, or “push factors”).

Implementing

6. Re/design your “employment offer” and clearly convey it in your recruitment process.
7. Screen out those for whom your agency does not make a compelling enough offer (“goodness of fit”).
8. Re/design an array of internal programs (e.g., onboarding, development, performance management, recognition) to make good on this offer to your staff.
9. Use an internal communication effort to continuously reinforce your “ongoing” offer.
10. Evaluate how well or poorly you are making good on your offer, how it is impacting retention, what turnover is “costing” your agency (most often estimated at 1-2x annual salary), and whether or not your offer needs to be adjusted to a changing environment.
11. Make continuous improvements to your offer, and your agency as needed, to attract and retain the staff you need to execute your strategy.

Here is a model containing 32 attributes* for attracting and retaining staff, clustered within four general categories:

<u>Compensation</u>	<i>Internal Mobility</i>	Work Flexibility
Base Salary	<i>Work Challenge</i>	Telecommuting
Pay Equity	<i>Cutting-Edge Work</i>	Child Care
Bonuses and Incentives	Role Clarity and Alignment	
Health Benefits	<i>Project Responsibility</i>	<u>Organizational Environment</u>
Retirement Contributions	Safety	Agency Reputation
		Agency Performance
<u>Work Environment</u>	<u>Work-Life Balance</u>	Senior Team Reputation
<i>Supervisor Quality</i>	Business Travel	Stakeholder Relationships
Recognition	Work Location	Strategic Partnerships
<i>Co-Worker Quality</i>	Vacation Time/Time Off	<i>Development Reputation</i>
<i>Empowered, Teaming Culture</i>	Work Hours (#, Time of Day)	Technology Level
Serving a Cause	Workload Reasonableness	Entrepreneurialism

Some related points:

- Many of these attributes are not that costly to improve or would be things an agency would seek to improve anyway.
- **Supervisor Quality** is the attribute most strongly related to staff staying.
- Ten or more negatively perceived attributes, or “push factors,” will typically lead to a decision to leave, and eventually turnover, regardless of the positive attributes.
- In general, US professional staff have moved from a stability and security motivation (e.g., retirement benefits, job security) towards a career-and skill-building motivation (see those attributes in italics).
- **Serving a Cause** is an attribute for which public human service is especially well-positioned, provided it can be supported by the day-to-day of your agency.
- Our target labor market might also lean towards the work-life balance attributes.