

Retaining your stars:

Supernovas or moon dust ?

by Helen McPhun

You developed the recruitment strategy, co-ordinated the interview panel, conducted the interviews, selected the star applicant and finally ironed out a win/win contract. Now, 14 months down the road you are going through the same process again. Your star has moved on to another galaxy.

Retaining the stars in your corporate galaxy can be a full-time job. Whether you aim to retain and harvest the skills of the highly engaged, or motivate and manage the minds of the less enthused, training can play an important role.

Many studies in New Zealand and abroad have found that management culture and effectiveness have a huge impact on staff retention.

Those managers have responsibility for the staff with full engagement (known as supernova, exploding with energy and input); the staff with complacent engagement (the common everyday night star); and the staff suffering from disengagement (also known as moon dust and planetary vapour). The complacent and the disengaged supposedly depict your 'talent at risk'.

However, it is often the fully engaged who get up and move on and this phenomenon depicts your company's 'precious talent at huge risk'.

From time to time there is a major change at the top and a

new senior executive hurtles through the galaxy like a giant meteor. Roles are obliterated, departments are realigned, and mass confusion occurs until the dust settles and a new sense of order appears. External forces may affect your organisation like the current 'Big Bang' from our economic uncertainty. Both internal and external forces can cause intergalactic confusion with huge impact on your staff.

Regardless of the events or circumstances, the engaged and somewhat complacent will respond more positively if they are given career development opportunities that are linked with their personal objectives, and offered training opportunities that help to develop their full potential.

Meeting personal needs and continually developing the skills and abilities of your team is critical. Succession planning will also future proof your organisation; however, this will be a moot point if the supernova drifts off to other galaxies.

Training plays a key role in retaining your staff. Your training needs to take a multi-pronged approach to motivate and engage

all staff and most importantly, all levels of management. The corporate universe does not function well when the managerial planets are out of alignment and the sun has lost its strength. Research shows us time and time again that the majority of staff members leave because of the management and the organisational environment.

It is, therefore, equally important, if not more important, to provide training to the top layers in the organisation.

The training focus for any organisation should be all encompassing – inside out and upside down – not just the front line staff.

If statistics world-wide prove that most people move to another job because of their manager or work environment, the solution does not appear to involve rocket science. The key focus for organisations should be development of the entire team.

The senior managers are likely to have great corporate knowledge and training, and that has got them to where they are.

That does not mean they arrive in senior positions with the skills and abilities to demonstrate successful and motivating management behaviours: the behaviours that promote loyalty and full engagement.

Distribution of funds

Management and senior management often enjoy the luxuries of expensive training, have university courses in esoteric programmes paid for, and embark on lofty and exciting learning adventures – yet the front line staff are often denied training or get a miniscule annual training allowance.

Time and time again in companies all over New Zealand, the concern is raised about the distribution

of training dollars amongst the employees.

Some positive actions to retain your staff can be developed and documented in a Training Retention Action Plan (also known as 'Star Trap').

You train for compliance, safety, service and product knowledge, yet your training dollars are rarely spent to increase retention. If research shows star performers want career developmental training and personal development, then organisations need to provide this. The luminosity of your brightest stars will fade unless you create an atmosphere that promotes continued personal growth.

Some components for your training retention plan might include personal development processes. Your experts may not need a lot of subject matter training but it is doubtful that all or any of them have mastered excellence in self-awareness. Personal development can be as fine tuned as a one-off short course on time management, or as far reaching as a suite of sessions to raise self-awareness and really get inside what makes a person 'shine' at work.

In offering your staff a raft of self-awareness processes you invest in both their professional and personal development. This will help them to see themselves more clearly at work and that will have a spin off at home.

Engaging in programmes such as Belbin Team Roles allows managers and staff to identify where they fit in the team, who should naturally be given certain roles and who needs training and encouragement for specific tasks. Effective teams need all the roles covered, yet organisations often fill their teams with like-minded and similarly skilled staff who may

engage very well or very poorly and get nowhere!

Taking the management and staff through the Strengths Deployment Inventory can shed light on everyone in an organisation. Understanding how people act when things go well and then seeing how they change in stressful and busy situations can be a real eye-opener. As well as raising self-awareness, it helps employees understand those they work with and learn ways to avoid the conflict and dysfunctional fallout from personality clashes at work.

There are a multitude of great self-awareness tools, development programmes and personality indicators, including Myers Briggs, Tetramap, L.E.A.D., Johari Windows and many, many more. Some tools could be described as a bit glitzy and shallow, while others have proven demonstrated results. Some have quick and inexpensive self-administered tools and others require financial investments from very little to mind-boggling.

Training pathway

Creating a training pathway is another winning approach to consider. Rather than have a hit and miss approach to training or a traditional reactionary approach, determine sure-fire training components. Sequence the training over a sustained period of time and set staff on the programme. Reward completion of each stage with something special – anything from a morning tea and formal recognition, to a gala event for the year's graduates (budget-dependent of course).

Embark on qualification pathways. There are a multitude of certification programmes available through ITOs and training providers, or you could develop your own certification process. ITOs related to your company's field of work may be able to assist

you to find and pursue suitable national qualifications for your staff, and... there may be some financial advantages to this route.

Abraham Maslow taught us the basics on 1943 with his hierarchy of needs and there are now a plethora of tools and systems to help us understand how we work, who we affect, how we are motivated, how we are seen and who we damage.

Career development and personal development are seen as the driving forces of engagement. There might also be a scattering of galactic debris in the form of unguided and unskilled senior management. In any organisation there will always be sprinklings of moon dust and pockets of planetary vapour. Regardless, all members in your organisation could benefit from training.

Those disengaged souls could have increased levels of engagement if they embark on training they see as benefitting them. As well, the engaged and fully engaged will grab at the chance to improve, and be less attracted to leave.

To avoid the black hole appearing in your galaxy, invest in some training for your staff. You'll likely get the best results from initiatives that promote career development and personal development.

After all, nurturing the human spirit and promoting professional and personal growth in each staff member is not really rocket science.

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