



A Quality Employer

Attracting the right talent requires purposive action

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There are laws of attraction that get and keep the most talented people engaged in their work, loyal to their employers and committed to the industry. Quality employers have figured out how to maximize their attractiveness to the industry's top talent. This article identifies the seven strategies required to successfully recruit and retain value-added employees.



The Seven Strategies

The first strategy requires you to conduct an honest assessment of the structures in your dealership. Do you operate with a lot of arcane rules, bureaucratic structures or meaningless red tape? Or, are you so fast and furious that you lack sound policies and procedures? Are you missing sufficient structure to have a viable business model? Either extreme takes you out of the running for becoming a quality employer.

After you have assessed your structure, take the data gathered and begin fine-tuning your operations. Get input from the people doing the work on how structures can be redesigned to make workflow better. Ask people throughout your dealership for their insights. They have experience that can benefit the entire organization. If you engage them in process and structure redesign, you are giving them a vote of confidence and an opportunity to commit more deeply.

The second strategy is reflected in the first — to build collaboration and communication. The best and the brightest want to work in environments characterized by fluid communication up and down the chain of command, among peers, and with customers and suppliers. They want to know that they will be heard and that their input will be sought.

But, it does not stop with building good communication in the dealership. Leaders must also create environments where silos and fiefs are abandoned in favor of flat organizations that rely on cross-functional collaboration. This requires that sales and service share their unique perspectives with each other. It requires that even the most senior managers be approachable and accessible to all levels of employees. This collaboration extends to the relationships that are built with vendors and customers. Rather than viewing them as expendable, they must rise to a level of prominence. The competitive intelligence that they possess can spark significant enhancements in the dealership.

The third strategy is competitive compensation. Compensation extends beyond salaries and benefits. It includes perks like liberal leave to allow employees to volunteer in the community, tuition reimbursement for ongoing professional development and free lunches. Yes, free lunches. Employers who are generous enough to occasionally provide free meals reflect a concern for basic human needs.

While this sounds like a trivial thing to offer, it is a subtle sign of how much your dealership values its employees.

Take the time to evaluate your bonus and incentive plans to be certain that they are meaningful to the intended recipients. If you find that they are not, invite a team of employees to redesign the structure of these plans. While you may fear that they will gouge the dealership and eliminate any profit margin, most people are reasonable and realistic. Even if what your employees propose is more than you can realistically offer, this is an opportunity to negotiate and compromise.

The fourth strategy is to build a learning environment that focuses on endless education. Investing in the education of individual employees is investing in the education of the entire organization. Knowledgeable employees at all levels give you a competitive edge. Turning your dealership into a learning organization demonstrates your commitment to growing people. This is a definite attractor for the kind of employees you want to hire and retain. They want to be in a workplace that focuses on their growth.

Think creatively as you begin to build a learning culture. All of the education need not be about products. Some of it should be about basic business skills like communication, negotiation and, of course, sales. Other education should focus on issues and trends in the office technology industry. Certainly, there will also be a need for training on teamwork, collaboration and conflict management.

Use a variety of tools to create this learning culture. There are options like webinars, TEDTalks, video-based learning and customized education designed specifically for your dealership. If you are short on dollars for this type of investment, forge a relationship with another similarly sized dealership and share the costs of combined education. While this may look like a bad move because it puts you in close contact with

a competitor, it actually benefits the entire industry to have skilled, knowledgeable employees as the norm.

Revising your performance management system is the fifth strategy. Prospective employees want to be in an equitable environment. In fact, your existing employees want the same thing. You can ensure equity by having a comprehensive performance management system that includes consistent coaching, regular evaluation and clear development goals for each employee.

The best and brightest employees look for employers that look at performance from a positive perspective. They do not want to wait for an annual evaluation that only reflects what the manager remembers from the last few weeks. They want to be evaluated fairly. They also want substantive information delivered in a timely manner upon which to build performance improvement.

The sixth strategy requires the creation of a social, celebratory environment. This is not to suggest that every day should

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be Mardi Gras, but rather that people want to work in places where colleagues get along, support and encourage each other. Engage the people throughout your dealership by encouraging social activities that connect employees. "Fun Committees" are wonderful tools that allow employees to determine what kind of activities they would like to launch and maintain.

There are simple strategies that you can use to build celebrations into the fabric of the dealership. Sending birthday, anniversary and other cards to acknowledge events in employees' lives is a basic, easy step. Having birthday parties and other formal or informal celebrations creates a culture of merriment. Hosting occasional potluck luncheons is another way to create a culture that focuses on the people in the dealership.

The seventh and final strategy is to eliminate any practices that are even remotely discriminatory. While most reasonable leaders do not intentionally uphold discriminatory practices, there are often accepted practices that have an exclusionary effect. Be willing to look at how you conduct all aspects of your business. Do you tolerate off-color jokes? Do you have salary practices that favor one gender over the other? Do you have occupational areas populated by specific ethnic groups? Any or all of these practices often exist without being noticed. Raise your level of consciousness to become aware of any practices that are not equitable. Abolish those practices as soon as they are revealed.

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Summary

Attracting and retaining the right talent to your dealership requires intentional, purposive action. Take each of these strategies one at a time. Pay close attention to the results that you get from making these changes. Publicize your results internally and externally. It is important to let employees know you are serious about enhancing the work environment. They can be your best recruiters.

The recruiting process is ongoing. It is more than slick ads and great bonuses. Employees are recruited daily by the environment that they experience in your dealership. Make every effort to stay focused on appreciating, rewarding and reinforcing your talent pool. ■

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