

Gaining a Competitive Advantage as an Employer of Choice

As the economy rebounds and more employers adapt to filling executive and management positions in the candidate-driven market, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to distinguish themselves as employers of choice, to attract top candidates. The most recent Gallup annual Work and Education poll revealed that only 47 percent of American workers are completely satisfied with their jobs, indicating employers are better positioned than ever to attract candidates who are ready to move out of current roles. So then how does a company become known as an employer of choice that attracts star talent and makes employees never want to leave?

“In today’s job market, aggressive salary and benefits packages that will potentially beat out counteroffers are not enough to lure top performers to new companies,” says Rob Romaine, president of MRINetwork. “Employers have to develop unique ways to attract candidates into their companies and away from competitors.”

To accomplish this, employers have to connect with their employees, find out what is most important to them and then provide programs and services that will be of value to the entire staff. This entails providing career advancement opportunities, ongoing training and continuing education programs, atypical benefits packages and employee perks that will make any employee think twice about leaving. Some companies have gone to great lengths to achieve this, providing unlimited sick and paid time off, flexible work schedules, game rooms and

employee appreciation days where catered lunches, massage services and field days are brought in-house for staff enjoyment.

SAS Institute, a North Carolina software company, became the employer of choice in its industry by providing its employees with workplace amenities like an on-campus gym, no limit on sick days, company gates that don’t open until 7 a.m. and close promptly at 6 p.m., and maybe most importantly – free M&Ms. These perks resulted in a turnover rate 16 percent less than competitors.

So what strategies can companies use to establish themselves as employers of choice? “It’s important for companies to realize they can’t become an employer of choice overnight,” says Romaine. “It takes a collaborative effort from multiple teams within the organization, focused on developing and implementing strategies that attract star candidates and retain key employees. Each department has to look at what they can do in their respective areas to contribute to this process.”

The following are steps companies can take to become an employer of choice:

1. **Know the company culture** and the type of employees the company hopes to attract.
2. **Develop a sound employer branding strategy** that is focused on distributing consistent messaging about the company culture and mission to clients, investors, employees and candidates.
3. **Conduct periodic employee surveys** to determine employee satisfaction with the company. This provides staff an opportunity to express their feelings on

	Completely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Total dissatisfied
	%	%	%
The physical safety conditions of your workplace	73	19	8
Your relations with coworkers	69	25	5
The flexibility of your hours	60	26	15
The amount of vacation time you receive	54	20	20
Your boss or immediate supervisor	54	28	11
Your job security	49	34	15
The amount of work that is required of you	49	32	19
The recognition you receive at work for your work accomplishments	46	34	17
The health insurance benefits your employer offers	35	22	31
Your chances for promotion	33	31	23
The retirement plan your employer offers	33	26	27
The amount of money you earn	30	41	28
The amount of on-the-job stress in your job	29	37	33

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everything from benefits and career opportunities to a variety of company-wide practices, while identifying areas that can be improved.

4. **Review the feedback from employee surveys** and develop strategies to improve areas of concern.
5. **Look for unique ways to create the “ultimate employee experience”**, reasons that make employees never want to leave, including anything from on-site cafeterias, gyms or daycare to parking and transit privileges.
6. **Submit a company nomination** for an Employer of Choice or Best Places to Work award in your industry. These awards invoke employee pride and bring increased credibility to the company brand.

While hiring managers may not always have the authority to implement the above strategies, there are things they can do to help retain employees. They can create career tracks for each position, so employees have a clear path for advancement in the company. They can also provide ongoing training, development and mentoring opportunities. Managers should additionally create an environment where creativity and outside the box thinking is encouraged. Finally, managers should reward employees for a job well done via company announcements and awards, or performance-based bonuses, promotions and raises.

Retention of happy, top performers is the most critical strategy for companies to become employers of choice. This is where the status of being a choice employer begins – promotion of the company’s values through the ambassadorship of employees.

“What makes a company a great place to work for some people will not be great for others,” advises Romaine. However, a company that is an employer of choice will recognize this in the hiring process and give as much consideration to the candidate’s fit with the organization as it does to experience, qualifications and talent. They will additionally recognize the value in providing a collaborative, company-wide approach to not only attracting, but also retaining top performers that will move the company forward.”

