



Re-Recruit *Your* Top Talent

If you expect to win the war to keep your employees, you must continually ensure that the best offer a top performing employee receives comes from inside your own firm. For this to happen, management must periodically approach top talent and recruit them again, or re-recruit them, just as if they were a new external prospect.

Although I coined the term "re-recruit" over 20 years ago, it is still an effective retention tool. Its basic premise is that you must re-energize your best employees every few years by either redesigning their jobs or offering them a new one that is clearly superior to what any external recruiter might offer them.

Managers should periodically change and update what the company has to

offer during the re-recruiting process. Re-recruiting is necessary because even if your top performers are loyal and have not actively applied for a new job, they are still constantly being identified, assessed, and contacted by corporate recruiters and by employees seeking out potential employee referrals. Your desirable employees will also be identified indirectly through benchmarking efforts and having their ideas and work viewed and/or read on the Internet and on social media.



...and Win the War to **Keep Your Employees**

Why re-recruiting is effective

Re-recruiting your own employees is a powerful and proven retention and productivity improvement approach.

1. **Re-recruiting can keep them out of a rut:** Even well-treated top talent will eventually get bored or want a change of pace. Research has shown that entering a rut can occur as often as every

18 months, so new opportunities need to be offered frequently.

2. **Employees have continual contact with recruiters:** Because the best employees are contacted up to five times a week, managers must realize that top talent doesn't need to apply for a job to get an external offer. Unfortunately, many managers are naive, not realizing that recruiter and referral contacts are continuous because the Internet and

social media make finding and communicating with top talent so easy.

3. **The process makes internal offers more exciting:** Re-recruiting works because it is based on the foundation principle that top performers and innovators want continuous excitement, to be doing the best work of their life, and to have a significant impact. To ensure that that these three things are continually happening, re-recruiting requires that you assign responsibility to both

their manager and HR to maintain that excitement. And by sharing the responsibilities, you increase the likelihood that several individuals are making sure that targeted employees periodically receive superior internal offers that meet each of these three factors.

4. Unexpected recognition can be powerful:

Because re-recruiting is not a scheduled event, employees are often surprised and very pleased to hear that the firm thinks highly enough of them to recruit them again without the pressure created by an external offer. Obviously the same exact offer by the firm in response to an external offer would not be viewed as positively. In addition, because it happened once, most employees will assume that they will be periodically re-recruited in the future if they stay.

5. Being first with an offer has an impact:

If their current firm makes their re-recruiting offer first, the odds are high that the employee will stay because of inertia, co-worker and family pressure, and the fact that there is no counter-offer to compare to.

6. Typical internal opportunities are not driven by competition:

Because managers take many employees for granted and are not aware of external competition, internal offers are likely to be as much as 25% lower — in rewards, excitement, and learning — than the verbal offer that they received from an external recruiter.

External recruiters beat internal managers at selling. Even if your top performers receive excellent internal opportunities, these are unlikely to be sold as effectively as external recruitment. Internal openings are usually merely posted, and no internal recruiter proactively contacts employees to tell them how exciting they are and how the employees would be a great fit. Internal offers usually come from managers who are not as skilled at selling as trained recruiters are. An external recruiter is likely to continually rave about a potential recruit's talents and potential,

while those offering internal opportunities are likely to be more reserved.

In addition, external recruiters never mention any downsides at their firm, so your employee will hear only about the rosy side of any new external opportunity. Therefore, your job is to assure that the best offer a top performer receives comes first from within your firm rather than from an outside recruiter.

Re-recruiting action steps

The concept of re-recruiting is pretty simple. You apply the tools and strategies of external recruiting to your top current employees. Instead of waiting and having to compete against other offers side by side, a manager proactively makes a compelling internal offer first to their top talent.

1. Make re-recruiting a goal: Start by adopting the premise that unless they are re-recruited, no one will stay at your firm longer than 18 to 24 months. Drop loyalty from your vocabulary and assume you must continually excite top talent if you are to keep them. Make "the best offer will come from the inside" the goal for both managers and HR. Make successfully re-recruiting a percentage of top-performing employees each year part of a manager's bonus criteria.

2. Develop a re-recruiting toolkit: HR must accept responsibility for developing an effective re-recruiting approach and work with your external recruiting function to come up with how-tos and sample templates for managers to use. This toolkit should also include a list of the possible re-recruiting options (e.g., flexibility, pick your own project, pick your own leader) that managers can offer to their re-recruited employees. Consider putting up an internal online re-recruiting forum to exchange ideas and to share problems.

3. Identify and prioritize re-recruiting targets: Require managers to identify

who they would classify as "regrettable turnover" within their team. Prioritize those employees and focus your retention efforts on those employees you would most regret losing.

4. Identify top performers who are at risk of leaving: Although re-recruiting all top performers is a good idea, limited resources may force you to focus your retention efforts on those individuals at a high risk of leaving in the near future. Recruiters can help by identifying which jobs and job families are being targeted by external recruiters. HR should help by developing a list of precursors or indicators that can help a manager assess whether a targeted individual employee is at risk of leaving. At-risk indicators may include average length of time in previous jobs, the number of frustration and excitement factors, whether an individual is overdue for a raise or promotion, and whether an employee feels underused.

5. Put together a list of re-recruitment excitement factors: Provide managers with an updated list of approved factors that have routinely excited employees in past re-recruiting efforts. This list can help individual managers create an effective re-recruiting offer each time.

6. Put together personalized retention plans: Because you are targeting only top performers, you can afford to personalize retention plans that meet the unique needs of individual employees. For each target, HR must work with the employee's manager to understand the "frustrators" that are causing them to think about leaving, the likely turnover triggers that might cause them to begin a job search, and the appropriate set of personalized retention actions to use to counter each turnover-related factor for this individual. The retention plan should also include goals, intermediate success measures, and who will be accountable for each step of the plan.

7. Approach an employee to re-recruit them: Starting the re-recruitment

process can be awkward for a manager, so provide them with a rough script. Start with a phrase like “Because you are one of our most important employees, I would like to talk with you today about updating your current role so that it is more exciting, challenging, and meaningful. I would like you to help identify how we could change and update your role over the next few months so that you enthusiastically look forward to coming to work each and every morning.”

- 8. Identify internal re-recruiters and help sources:** The very best firms like Cisco and Booz Allen Hamilton have designated internal “movement teams” of their own recruiters that proactively seek out and move top talent. If you can’t afford a mobility team, provide training on the re-recruiting process to your managers as well as the names of your own recruiters who are willing to advise and coach on how to excite a recruit, even a current employee.
- 9. Process:** Because the job marketplace is continually changing, your re-recruiting process needs to be continually updated and improved. Six months after re-recruiting an employee, interview them and find out what worked and what didn’t work. Also conduct a “failure analysis” any time an employee who was targeted for re-recruiting quits.

Some additional actions to consider

- 1. Get help in identifying who and why:** Ask your current employees to help you “keep the team together” by identifying those in the team they feel are at risk of leaving and what would cause them to leave. “Why do you stay?” interviews with targeted employees can also identify the factors that make individuals stay and the factors that might cause an employee to leave.
- 2. Understand external offers:** Identify the elements of typical external offers for each key position by looking at those

your new hires received. Ask executive search professionals to periodically update you on the offers that similar professionals are getting in the marketplace.

- 3. Prepare an instant response:** When your employees actually get an external offer, prepare an instant counter-offer strategy and action plan so that you can respond immediately and effectively.
- 4. Make praise and recognition routine:** Without making it appear staged, periodically tell your current top employees how important they are and how much they contribute. Consider asking them for the professional courtesy of notifying you when they begin a job search or even consider an external offer.
- 5. Identify frustrators:** Periodically ask your top-performing employees what frustrates them in their current job. Ask what factors restrict their productivity and innovation. Use that information to remove frustrators and barriers to success. For the very best employees you want to re-recruit, ask them to describe their dream job and where they would like to be in the next year, and then work to provide it.

Final thoughts

The concept of re-recruiting is really quite simple. Periodically update your original job offer — the one when they started — or with their last promotion, so that it appears new, fresh, and exciting to a top-performing employee. And don’t just settle with re-recruiting once. Assume that it will be necessary to update their offer and their job periodically if you expect people to stay loyal and productive.

If you expect to win the war to keep your employees, you must forever bury the notion that the best employees will naturally stay at your firm without your periodically taking proactive actions. Employee retention is problematic because we live in a world where the minute after a manager does something to anger or frustrate an employee, they

can react by applying for a new job by simply pushing a single button on their smart phone. And even if they never push that application button, managers need to realize the best, because of their visibility, will be found and contacted on a regular basis by either recruiters or employees trying to make a successful referral. Taken together, that means that in a world full of job offers, both the first and the best job offers come from inside the employee’s current firm.

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Used with the permission of Dr. John Sullivan, Professor of Management, San Francisco State University, and a thought leader on strategic talent management and human resource practice. For more information, email johns@sfsu.edu or visit www.drjohnsullivan.com.

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