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5 ways to retain staff in a downturn

- With many expats priced out of their lifestyles, how do companies entice employees to stay?



By ASMA BAJAWA
Special to GN Focus

The year began with a feeling of economic uncertainty that has already had an impact on the job market. In every sector, companies are tightening their belts; in finance alone, it has been reported that there have been 1,500 jobs losses across the region in recent months.

In a region where increments and bonuses are almost seen as a given regardless of performance, companies now have difficult decisions to make. So what does this mean for organisations that want to keep good people but don't have the resources? There is no one-size-fits-all answer. The region's workforce is made up of a diverse range of nationalities and cultures, on top of which is the added complexity of managing different generations that are motivated by different things. This is significant when it comes to developing strategies for employee retention. The decision to stay or go can often boil down to how an employee feels about the organisation.

Here are some talent retention strategies that should be embedded into a company's day-to-day HR practice.

1 Fair pay

Paying people fairly can go a long way towards motivating and retaining them. Differentiating salaries by nationality is widely practised across the region, but this can create high levels of disengagement, lack of motivation and segmentation within teams. On a positive note, more organisations now recognise this as a real issue that can't be ignored. The exception to this is nationalisation, where positive action in the form of additional benefits has proven effective in retaining Emirati talent.

2 Staff-friendly policies

HR policies can contribute significantly towards employee retention, especially when budgets

are tight. Flexible working options and employee welfare schemes are increasingly important to all staff. In addition, specific retention policies can be very effective. Proven examples are enhancing end-of-service benefits beyond the minimum legal requirement, rewarding employees with extra leave for longer periods of service, or introducing retention payments for key employees.

3 Flexible benefits

Innovative and flexible benefits schemes can help a company attract and retain staff through tailor-made packages suited to their personal circumstances. This approach can be managed within the same cost base and allows employees to pick according to their own situation.

4 Growth and development

This issue is not specific to difficult times but is definitely one that a lot of employees – and particularly younger ones – ask about at the interview stage. Unlike the older generations where job security was the main concern, the young look for their own ROI from the organisation: What do I get in return? Can I learn, develop and grow? Is the work rewarding and will it challenge me? Unfortunately too many organisations still look outside when it comes to recruitment, instead of considering and developing internal talent. By creating growth opportunities for existing employees, an organisation can expect a positive shift in retention.

5 Relationships

Perhaps most importantly, the relationship between an employee and their manager can have a profound impact on his or her day-to-day life, not only at work but also at home. If an employee feels their manager is supportive, values their contribution, and supports them when things don't go so well, they are more likely to stay with an organisation. Regardless of how well you pay an employee, if these human factors are missing, employees are unlikely to commit to the organisation in the long run.

The writer is Managing Director, PeopleFirst HR Consultancy

CAREER COACH: IT'S TIME TO SPEAK UP

- Stay silent, and you're essentially agreeing with the status quo

By JOYCE E. A. RUSSELL

The craziness of US politics today has many wondering when some folks will finally speak up. Plenty of news stories have come out about how some leaders of the Republican Party had wished they had spoken up sooner and now fear it may be too late.

This phenomenon of not speaking up is not only prevalent in politics but also seems to be ubiquitous at work. All too often, people say nothing when there are ethical issues or other problems and then finally speak up after the damage is done. Or they just don't bother to offer their views or input almost as if they are apathetic to what happens.

There are a variety of explanations for this. Sometimes it is because of power differentials – they may be worried they will look silly or stupid, or be chastised for speaking up. Often at work we stay silent because we

want to avoid conflict, and yet by not speaking we may be creating more intense problems later. For example, we observe a culture of incivility or harassment, yet say nothing so we won't upset anyone. Of course, we then may be faced with more severe cases of harassment since we seemed to have condoned the earlier behaviors.

Employees may not speak up if they fear retribution or losing their jobs. Or maybe they think it is futile. That is, they believe that management doesn't care and no one will listen to them. How many times have we all heard the phrase, "I'm not saying anything because nothing will ever change?"

Such sentiment can be corrosive. A lack of dialogue can lead talented employees to psychologically withdraw from the company, their engagement can suffer, and relationships with their managers and colleagues can decline. Some will simply choose to leave. And that might not be the biggest problem. Without their voices being heard, the organisation may not discover critical problems. It might think everything is fine when in fact it is not.

If leaders want to avoid that trap, here's some ideas for fostering a more open climate:

- When attending a meeting, don't be the first to offer your views. Actively listen to others, and thank them.
- When listening to others, be fully present. Use effective eye contact, head nodding, and do not interrupt them.
- Watch your tone when responding to employees. Asking for clarification "can you explain that a little more" will sound very different if you scream it versus if you ask it as if you are really trying to understand.
- Use facilitators to get input from employees, especially if you anticipate strong negative voices that will discourage the vast majority to speak up.
- Act on the feedback you get from employees, even if it is something small. Explain why you are not able to act on other feedback. This shows responsiveness.
- Provide training to all employees so they know how to speak up in an appropriate manner and provide constructive feedback.

Create an open culture

It is the responsibility of leaders to create a culture of openness so employees feel comfortable speaking up. But then employees need to share their views. They shouldn't complain about things and then never take the time to attend a meeting or share their opinions. If you don't say something, you are essentially saying you agree or condone what is currently happening.

We can all learn a valuable lesson from today's political race. Every day we have a choice at work or other parts of life to stay silent or to speak up. Don't wait for someone else to do it for you. Otherwise, it just may be too late – and you'll have no one to blame but yourself.

The writer is Senior Associate Dean at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business. She is a licensed industrial and organisational psychologist with more than 25 years of experience consulting on leadership.

— Washington Post



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Are you being compensated enough?

- A Santa Monica start-up may have all the answers disgruntled employees are looking out for

By PARESH DAVE

Compensation and culture. Those workplace terms are at the heart of Comparably, a Santa Monica start-up that aims to give people more insight into whether they're being paid appropriately and deriving enough joy from work.

"We've built a platform to show what's your market value, where you rank in the company and how you compare in happiness," Chief Executive Jason Nazar says. "If you think about two big things people are focused on at work, it's how good is my experience and how much am I making."

Specific info

It's a bit like Glassdoor, Payscale and other existing online services. But Comparably is looking to draw better data to generate more accurate company reviews, and it wants to develop a well-known

"We've built a platform to show what's your market value, where you rank in the company and how you compare in happiness."

Jason Nazar
CEO,
Comparably

brand through workplace-focused articles and other services. Nazar says Comparably information will be more organised and specific than competitors.

Nazar, who previously founded and sold online document-sharing service Docstoc, started working on the project late last year



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with three other people. To start, they're inviting people who work at other Los Angeles technology companies to sign up, anonymously share how much money they make and answer a short survey about their employers' offices, perks and cultural traits.

A few companies and recruiters handed over salary data to initially populate the service. But once there's more data, Comparably expects to offer granular assessments: It could tell a young, female CEO that she makes \$12,000 (Dh44,075) less

than the average CEO at a tech start-up with 11 to 50 employees in Los Angeles, a sign that maybe she's being undervalued relative to men, who dominate that position.

Discreet dealings

Comparably also provides forums for users to chat anonymously with others in the industry who share their job function, such as product engineers and chief marketing officers. Users who connect

their LinkedIn account to Comparably will get additional information specific to their company.

Security measures, including scrambling email addresses, are intended to ensure that anonymous submissions stay that way, Nazar says.

Comparably is funded by \$6.5 million from several venture capital funds with major Southern California ties, including Upfront Ventures, Lowercase Capital, Crosscut Ventures, Pritzker Group, Rincon Venture Partners and BAM Ventures.

— Los Angeles Times