

Retaining your trainees

Following the CNW Business Breakfast on 8th March and the interactive discussion around training and development of high-potential apprentices, we have had a number of discussions in our office on the topic. Retention of staff is such a wide subject to debate, but we believe all tied in with communication and recognition.

It's a topic close to RMG's heart as a specialist search consultancy in the Chemicals sector. We see first-hand the need for companies to bring in the next generation of talent for future growth and succession planning.

Good companies are ones that actively invest in their people to develop their skills pipeline. They understandably want to retain their trained protégés for the medium-long term future if possible. Sadly, some SME's (and larger companies too) have accepted 'a reality' that is not ideal. Developing a new trainee (or an annual intake 'flow') and being happy to use their spark, enthusiasm, and new skills for maybe 1-2 years and accepting they may lose them in the competitive market for any number of reasons. Including overly impatient ambition, career development or the real need for wider experiences, support with studies, better pay or conditions.

It's been an impulsive candidate-led market in the last couple of years and whilst the market is starting to turn there is always competition for emerging or in-demand skills. 'Salary reality' is coming back into play, with motivations of good people being wider than just an uplift in salary, perhaps having heard stories of 'the grass not always been greener' rebounding in the market.

Here's our thoughts on retention of your graduates, apprentices, trainees;

- Ensure trainees understand the bigger picture – if they can see how their role contributes to the overall direction of the business, they will find the role more fulfilling. Take time to explain business goals for the year and how their work feeds in to this.
- It's essential to find out what motivates them; do your best to make it possible for them to achieve this. By challenging them and matching their ambition.
- Offer clear succession planning and development opportunities and tracking this. But be realistic, don't over-promise and raise their expectations to a level that can't be met, or set them on a pedestal in their own mind.
- FEEDBACK – perhaps the most important aspect. Make sure your trainees know what they are doing well (and not) right there and then. Behaviours become entrenched and difficult to change if not addressed in the moment.
- Introduce cross departmental working – get them involved. Conflicts often arise in projects when people don't know those who work in other teams, and this is particularly true for

trainees who may be trying to find their feet. Getting trainees to meet and work on projects with colleagues across the business will ensure better team working dynamics and also help them to see other opportunities across the business, that if left working in silos will rarely happen.

- Let them know they are valued. Talk openly to them regularly and encourage them to share their views. A monthly catch up is essential and in-person is far better than virtual to build solid relationships that last.
- Ensure your company is genuinely living up to its values – take temperature checks regularly with employee engagement surveys and consider 360 appraisal systems. These aren't expensive to implement but can provide valuable feedback and a good benchmark from which you can measure changes.
- Appreciate work-life balance matters.

All the above were made exceptionally hard during the pandemic with remote working, but we're pleased to see a change with more businesses returning to offices providing greater collaboration. It's the graduates and junior members of staff who have most to lose if working remotely. Things they would learn by being close to more experienced colleagues will accelerate learning and that can only have a positive impact on employee engagement and of course, in turn, business growth.

For further details visit - RMG – Recruitment Management Group - rmg-uk.com



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