The Impossible Dream

You've hired a fabulous staff: How do you keep them from leaving?

Staffs come and staffs go. According to *ComputerWorld's* job satisfaction survey, IS departments reported a nine percent turnover rate in 1995. IS departments in industries such as healthcare and retail incurred an 11 percent turnover rate. This job switching can be attributed to a variety of desires, such as increased salary, more responsibility, or a more positive work environment.

As a manager, you must get past the frustration that can accompany staff turnover and focus on retaining and rebuilding the remaining staff. Here are some strategies you can implement to make your work environment a more positive one. Of course, the success of these tactics relies on flexibility and adaptability on the part of management and the company.

IT MIGHT BE ABOUT MONEY...

Often, a pay increase is the only motivation needed to jump ship. Because headhunters call regularly, some companies systematically increase the IS staff members salaries to match the competition's rates. Don't assume that staff members are unaware of their coworkers' or peers' salaries. Although salaries should be private, they rarely are.

Another money issue that can cause problems is ongoing budget cuts. Continuous scrimping in the areas of staffing, training, and projects wears people down. Parsimonious departments have higher turnover because no one wants to be in an environment where budgetary constraints hobble them from doing their best job.

...BUT IT MIGHT NOT

Money talks, but not as loudly as it once did. According to LAN Magazine's 1995 salary survey, network managers weighed the opportunity to advance and the quality of upper management as more important than their salary (see figure). Following are management techniques, other than salary increases, that contribute to a satisfied network team

• Job challenge. Cultivate your most valued employees with choice assignments. Network managers in LAN *Magazine's* 1995 salary survey ranked job challenge as the most important aspect of their job.
• Working conditions. People don't thrive under undue stress. As a manager, you are responsible for making the work environment a humane one. A friendly atmosphere with reasonable deadlines and that focuses on communication and teamwork will build staff morale.
• Bonuses. Recognize exceptional work on a specific project, consistent hustling, or overtime with a one-time bonus. Keep in mind that some employees may value a bonus in the form of extra paid time off rather than as more money
• Nontraditional work environments. Telecommuting or work sharing may be a worthwhile perk for some employees, especially those who face long commutes, less traditional work patterns, or significant family or outside responsibilities.
• Training. Training can be an effective retention weapon when considered an investment in an employee. It must be followed by opportunities to exercise the new skills and recognition when employees reach new levels of expertise.

HEALTH ISSUES

Extended keyboard work can lead to a host of physical problems. The research on workplace ergonomics is far from conclusive, and many common beliefs and general rules have not held up to scrutiny. Carpal tunnel syndrome seems to be running rampant, along with back and neck injuries that may be as much a result of stress as bad furniture design. Have a qualified physician or your organization's occupational health and safety office (if it has one) evaluate your department's work area.

Noam H. Arzt is director of information technology architecture and network services in the division of information systems and computing at the University of Pennsylvania.