

Retaining Staff During Peak Season

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You've spent the offseason hiring and training your team and now the summer rush is finally here. So how do you retain your team members and just as importantly, drive them to want to return to your business next year when each day of the prime season feels like a one-day marathon to survive until tomorrow?

Overall success relies heavily on the dedication and hard work of each and every one of your team members. In order to create an environment where everyone on your team truly feels appreciated and motivated, you need to implement a few key strategies.

Firstly, it's crucial that everyone (no matter what their title, level, or job responsibilities) consistently be respectful and positive in their interactions with one other. Things get busy but that's not an excuse to not treat each other politely. Almost anyone who has worked in an organization will hear words of truth in David Cottrell's assertion that "people quit people before they quit the company." Don't unintentionally force some of your employees to quit because of the actions (and inactions) of others on your team. Ensure that your organization's communications and behaviors reflect that principle.

Second, try and "catch" your staff doing their jobs well and then immediately praise them for it. Rather than focusing on finding mistakes and areas of opportunity, aim for a 5:1 ratio of praise to criticism. Recognizing and celebrating your staff's individual success will boost their morale, motivate the entire team, and drive more such behaviors. The difference between positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement on a hot day in the middle of the peak season when everyone is being pulled in lots of different directions can't be overstated.

To reinforce such behaviors, I also recommend you institute an "Employee of the Week" program to specifically celebrate outstanding team members on a weekly basis. Since the camping season is so short, frequent recognitions can help maintain team motivation and morale. If you find that there are multiple outstanding performers in a week (a great "problem" to have), celebrate them all equally. There's no rule that you can only have one Employee of the Week. On the other hand, also be comfortable with the concept of not having an "Employee of the Week" if no one stands out that week. Recognizing an underperformer can have the opposite impact and actually demoralize the team.

While an end-of-season staff appreciation party is a good idea, I recommend adding a mid-season celebration, perhaps after a holiday weekend like the 4th of July, because as we all know, our short seasons feel very "long" in the middle of the peak season and a little celebration and appreciation goes a long way to keeping morale high throughout the season. Never underestimate the power of some free pizza, ice cream, and time to relax and socialize with one another.

Finally, actively seek feedback from your staff to learn what works for them. They have valuable insights and ideas that can

truly improve your staff retention strategies. After all, they're the target of your retention strategies. If they say something, listen and incorporate it into your plans. It can make a significant difference and happy staff members become your best recruiters for future employees. ☺



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