5 Ways HR Leaders Can Engage and Empower Hourly Workers

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The turnover rate for hourly employees has always been, and continues to be, extremely high. Retail, for example, has a turnover rate of around 60 percent, and other sectors can be even higher than that. This is a real problem for businesses since replacing an employee costs on average $4,969, according to a 2015 survey. For any business, that is a large cost that could be avoided with better management.

HR managers can mitigate this level of turnover by *engaging* with hourly employees, so they feel listened to and respected, and *empowering* them with specific work benefits that can lower this churn rate. Let’s dive into five ways that HR leaders can help.

1. Engage them with better communication through texts and video

Engaged employees tend to stick around instead of looking for a new job elsewhere, and a large part of being engaged is feeling recognized, heard, and thanked. In fact, companies with “high-recognition” of their employees see a 31 percent lower turnover rate than those that don’t.

A great tool to communicate with hourly employees is text messaging. It’s easy and inexpensive to implement, doesn’t

take any extra effort on the part of the employees, and can feel more personal than a corporate email while being less intimidating than a phone call. HR managers can even automate the first contact, sending out scheduled texts to check in, and then being available to respond if and when employees text back any concerns or questions. You'd be surprised how far a simple "Hey, I heard you did a great job today from your shift leader. Just want to say we see it and we highly appreciate it!" can go.

Another way to communicate and raise engagement is through video. Asking hourly employees to read admittedly boring and technical documentation can be a drain on their energy. It's much easier to send a short (2-3 minute) video, again via text, to produce company updates, share a new product, or celebrate milestones. Many companies encourage employees to upload their own videos to share with other workers, which can make team bonding even better.

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2. Empower them with training and upward mobility

Surprisingly, almost a third of employees do not receive workplace training and a common reason why hourly workers feel frustrated and disengaged from work is the lack of proper training to do their job better. This is compounded when they see no clear path to promotion at their job; if they're not being trained to do what they're *currently* doing, what are the odds that they are being trained up for the next level?

HR leaders should be empowering hourly employees with both training and opportunities to advance. Establish a clear, vetted initial training program for hires. Provide a mentorship program using senior workers to foster talent. Most importantly, commit to promoting from within to show that

advancing is not only possible, but the path that you want these workers to take.

3. Engage them with attention to their quality of life

Hourly workers often have to deal with other stressors in their lives that can leave them disengaged at work. One stressor we hear about frequently is commuting time and options. No one likes commuting, but it can be especially hard for hourly workers to not only spend the time getting to and from work, but the out-of-pocket cost as well.

HR leaders should work with managers to consider commuting time between shifts. Allotting extra time can remove a large amount of stress from your employees' day-to-day. Also, companies who provide subway cards, a ride-share stipend, or even a carpool program can see their employees with more work satisfaction and better engagement overall.

Another big source of stress are the managers themselves. The lack of training mentioned above also extends to managers, and managing people is not something they should just be learning on the job. Training good managers leads to less overall friction between them and the hourly employees, making for a much better quality of life.

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4. Empower them with shifts that are both flexible and predictable

According to Shiftboard's "The State of the Hourly Worker," scheduling was the top complaint for hourly workers; the report found it to be the leading cause of of worker turnover.

When shift schedules are too rigid and too unpredictable, employees feel hugely disengaged. Autonomy is crucial for workers to feel empowered at their jobs. In fact, 49 percent of hourly workers are willing to trade pay for more control over their work schedule.

HR managers should take this stat to heart and work with managers to keep shifts flexible. While we can't have a free-for-all when it comes to scheduling, allowing workers to trade shifts, work additional shifts, or break up shifts into smaller chunks of time can all help provide more autonomy to workers.

At the same time, consistency and predictability are key pieces as well. Shift managers should be trained to release shift schedules as early as possible, as well as keep hours fair and consistent across employees. This must be a top-down initiative, because by the time you hear complaints about inconsistency from employees, it's usually already too late.

5. Empower them with health insurance

Finally, and this rings very true now: Providing health insurance is a huge motivator to retain hourly workers. Even before this public health crisis, hourly workers were willing to sacrifice pay for health insurance. Today, as America struggles to slowly open back up for business, healthcare is more essential than ever before. Many employees are refusing to come to work without adequate protection in place, and health insurance is crucial to provide.

It's probable that healthcare and safety will be prioritized from now on in America. Hourly workers will be looking for protective equipment, training, and insurance when they are looking to stay with a job for the long haul. HR leaders need to also prioritize these benefits when looking to engage,

empower, and retain the best hourly workers.

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