

# I've Had Zero Turnover at My Company For 6 Years. Here's How We Did It – and How You Can, Too.

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A CEO on our board came to a company event last year and commented with surprise over the range of ages she saw on our team. Nothing negative, she said, but given the industry reputation, she was shocked to see so many older people at a tech company. Her own company was much younger, and she wondered if our age diversity might be a factor in our success.

While many companies have been facing recession and resignation, our company has been reporting record-high retention, employee satisfaction and growth. We have had zero turnover company-wide since 2018. Our common cultural connection around collaboration and teamwork makes working together fun, and age diversity is certainly a part of that equation.

An organization filled with 20-year-olds runs the same risk as one with only men or all women – everyone views situations from the same perspective and is less likely to see opportunities to innovate. CEOs who are struggling with employee retention might do well to consider how to better draw and manage age diversity.

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## Hire for balance

Part of why I conduct the first round of interviews is to pre-filter candidates for someone both qualified to do the job and whose unique perspective would best complement the team and overall company dynamics. Rather than setting a bunch of uncomfortable rules for my leadership teams, I am purposeful about every hire and consider how to bring in as many people as possible representing different ages, genders and any other diverse traits within and across teams as I can. As a result, our team represents almost every type of diversity.

The secret sauce, however, is not diversity for diversity's sake – it is hiring to find a culture fit. I would never bring in an older person who thought young people were incompetent, nor a young person who thought older people were out of touch – both would struggle on an age-diverse team. Even when I try to hire age-diverse candidates, they also have to show a desire to collaborate and be a team player. As long as we share a purpose, goal and common interest, that diversity benefits everyone. Leverage diverse recruitment channels to draw out a broad age range of candidates and ensure hiring managers consider the existing team makeup and what degree of experience would make them better.

## Hire for relationships

Twenty years ago, I hired fewer 50-year-olds to join me at my first startup than I have at my company today. At the time, my existing relationships were largely with other 20- and 30-year-olds, and I tended to hire people I already knew. Even back then, I understood the power of strong relationships in business. Researchers have found that high-quality workplace relationships between leaders and their staff improved commitment, and that leaders who prioritize employee relationships are more successful.

Once we grew to a team of seven, everyone was in their 40s and 50s, and I became more intentional about getting junior workers to apply to ensure a healthy balance. I tend to hire people who value culture over money, and they also end up being older with more experience. Younger workers can bring high energy and fill crucial entry-level roles, but they may have goals of earning higher compensation and advancing their careers that can outweigh building strong workplace connections. People with more experience working at many different places tend to know what they like and what they dislike about a work environment. When we hire people who value culture and relationships, we often find people with more years of experience.

## **Hire for experience**

When circumstances demand experience, hiring for experience matters. Early in my career, I hired two junior developers, each at less than half the cost of a senior developer, and learned that lesson quickly. While a junior developer can be very complementary to a senior developer, two junior developers are not often more effective than one experienced developer. Now, I know better and hire people based on what value they can create, not to save money. Add in the impact on culture and relationships and, when needed, experience is usually worth it.

Older, more experienced employees help mentor the younger ones and aid in developing a sustainable talent pipeline. Mentorship is the biggest advantage of age on a team. Not a lot of 20-year-olds have enough experience to be mentors and a company full of juniors has no one to learn from. When we hired my right hand, Megan, we matched her up with a wide range of mentors to support and develop her raw talent and energy. Now, after 10 years, she is a mentor to new hires in their 20s taking on her original role. Age diversity creates a team dynamic where senior people help junior people, who then

grow in their careers.

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## Adjust along the way

To draw and retain a multigenerational workforce, we have to be willing to customize activities, recognition and benefits to cater to it. Experienced workers might care more about health insurance while younger workers may prefer remote work options or flexibility. People with families may prefer more time off. My first company was largely made up of 20 and 30-year-olds and few of them were parents, so they liked high-energy events as rewards. Later, I learned older workers wanted to see more family-friendly activities.

Still, individual participation in rewards and recognition is not always dependent on age. Some people love giving and receiving public accolades through our Hey Taco peer rewards program, but others shy away from them. Engagement with our social events – the Las Vegas trip, a Mardi Gras mask-making contest, hand turkeys; and newlywed-style coworker gameshows – is probably more driven by their personalities rather than age. As leaders, our best approach to engage people of all ages is always figuring out what they like and aiming to fit that unique set of needs.

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