

Work Environment and Employee Retention

Hiring new employees can be very costly. The process of recruiting, reviewing applications, interviewing, and training is time consuming and expensive. To decrease these costs, employers need to find ways to decrease employee turnover. The foodservice industry has an especially high turnover rate. Employees are often young workers who view foodservice jobs as a stepping stone to better jobs. This paper examines studies from various industries to find what work environment factors increase employee retention, and thereby decrease the costs of employee turnover.

Overall, the greatest factor that influenced employee retention was a sense of community. In a study of seasonal employees working at summer camps, 953 previous summer camp employees were surveyed to assess the relationship between the sense of community they felt while working at the summer camp and their intentions to return the next summer to work there again. There was a significant relationship between sense of community and intent to return. Also, the employees who reported the greatest sense of community were most likely to return. When employees do not feel that they are a part of a community, it makes working in that environment undesirable. To increase employees' desire to stay with an organization, managers must invest in ways to increase the perceived sense of community.

One strategy to creating a sense of community is making employees feel empowered and important to the organization. One review looked at how changes in the work environment enhanced the retention of nurses and increased the quality of care in clinical settings. The most successful strategies for creating a positive work environment focused on empowering

employees and increasing their sense of autonomy. These strategies included increasing participation in organization affairs, improving manager leadership and support, and having adequate staffing and resources. Not only did these changes decrease employee turnover, but the changes also increased the nurses' productivity and quality of care. These changes to the work environment enhance the sense of community that workers feel by making them feel important and valued.

Another method to increase perceived employee value is to increase flexibility and work-life support. In one study, researchers looked at the effect of flexible work practices on employee engagement and retention. Employees from 15 companies were surveyed about employee stress, burnout, work-life support and conflict, and expected retention. Employees who felt that their job afforded them enough flexibility and support to manage the demands of both work and life, were more likely to stay employed at the same company for a longer amount of time. In another study, 412 employees from 118 restaurants completed a survey and ranked a list of job attributes by level of importance. The number one most desirable attribute was a flexible schedule. When employees are given the flexibility to handle the demands of life and work, they feel like they are valued in their working community.

Foodservice managers should invest in practices that increase employee sense of community, including making employees feel empowered, offering schedule flexibility, and having adequate staffing and resources. While implementing some of these practices may seem to initially increase costs, in the long run, the benefits from these changes will offset these costs. Increasing employee retention not only decreases the costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and training new employees, but also increases employee productivity and quality of work.

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