



Winning at Hiring, Training and Retaining
Landscape Employees

Contractor's Guide to Employee Retention



Introduction

Our industry faces an unprecedented labor shortage that will require new thinking and new practices in the years ahead.

Consider these important facts:

- **Over the next decade, the pool of available workers is predicted to grow at the slowest pace** since the Civil War, impacted by rapid retirements of the Baby Boom generation and a low worker replacement rate from "Generation Z" (the generation that follows the Millennials).
- **Unemployment is at 10-year lows** and is expected to stay there for the next several years, regardless of economic conditions.
- **During the recession, companies could get by with poor employee retention practices.** There was always a line of applicants to fill open positions. As a result, many under-invested in appropriate leadership training for managers. Now firms must improve quickly.

If your business depends on seasonal labor, you'll need to either figure out how to get more done with fewer workers, or become a leader in employee retention and recruiting.

It is much easier to keep a good worker than to find a new one.

The common myth is the key to retention is better pay. Sure, compensation is important, but it does not solve all problems. And conversely, employees won't look for better pay unless they're unhappy overall.



Consider these important tips for retention:

1) The biggest driver of employee retention: the first-line manager.

When the employee's direct supervisor takes an interest in his team and shows genuine concern for them, this has the greatest impact on successful employee retention.

The direct supervisor can connect with his team members by sharing:

- Feedback: Most employees get very little feedback. Positive feedback is great and has an immediate impact to feeling appreciated. Say "thank you" more often. Negative feedback is okay too, provided that it comes with specific action steps on how to improve performance. Show the path to progress. Eighty-nine percent of workers say that getting candid feedback is important, but only 39% say that they receive it!
- Information: Employees like to know what's coming up. They like to know how their work fits into the big picture. They like to know about the company's direction. They like to know what it takes to be successful. The front-line manager should be sharing this information, and repeating it over-and-over for retention.
- Interest: Team members appreciate being asked for their opinions. Take interest in their ideas for improvement. Be more open to suggestions and discuss how they're being implemented. Let's face facts: most front-line managers do a poor job of sharing feedback or information. It's a task that doesn't have a due date or a measured requirement. And talking to others is often outside of the manager's comfort zone. They just are not comfortable sharing feedback.

As a result, there's a tendency for feedback to be given a low priority among the manager's duties. Unfortunately, it is the **MOST IMPORTANT** for retention.

Take action:

1. Free up time for coaching, providing feedback and sharing information. Make these a priority in the long list of responsibilities front-line managers have.
2. Make sharing feedback a requirement. Implement scorecards or daily check ins to facilitate productive conversations.
3. Invest in managerial skills. Provide training for managers on coaching and feedback techniques from HR or outside experts. Most middle managers have never been taught these skills, so they're often uncertain exactly what to do. Scrutinize managers with high turnover rates.



"Sure, employees all want more compensation. They say they're quitting for more pay. But if they had a great manager, they wouldn't have looked in the first place."

2) Create a positive culture that values customers and employees equally.

Every company has a culture, whether intentional or not. Whether it's a set of declared values that are defined, nurtured and encouraged, or a result of behaviors and experiences of the group –it's a culture.

Examine your culture – are you sending consistent messages?

- 1) Do you expect employees to provide your customers great service with a smile, but not show equivalent respect to your team?
- 2) Do you value a neat, tidy appearance on your job sites, but then operate with a cluttered, dirty shop and worn equipment?

It's essential to "walk the talk" of your company culture, showing equal respect for your team members as you do your clients. If an employee is not in agreement with your company mission, he or she may not belong at your company.

Take action:

1. Define your company's values and make them visible to both current employees and new hires. (website, social media, company newsletter, etc.)
2. Hold managers accountable for behavior that reinforces and models appropriate company values.
3. Create one time, regular recognition (e.g. "atta boy" rewards) for team members who demonstrate company values.
4. Reinforce values of safety and fitness that contribute to employees' well being.



3) On-board new team members for success.

Too often there's a tendency for managers to rush new hires through paperwork and immediately "throw them into the field". This approach is great for the short term, but gives the employee little sense of where he or she fits into the overall organization.

Take a pro-active approach to welcome the employee into your organization and to grow his/her understanding of your team:

- Welcome new hires with a care-package of inexpensive company-branded gifts that can be used both at work and taken home. This builds goodwill with the employee's family too. Include a personalized welcome note from the owner or general manager.
- Celebrate the new hire with a team lunch on the first day, and during the lunch ask everyone to introduce themselves stating how long they've been with the company and a bit about themselves personally (family, hobbies, etc.). Forging positive relationships with co-workers is critical for "fitting in".
- Set a 90-day onboarding plan to establish expectations and create a foundation for open communication. The new hire can learn about other team members' roles and obtain a basic understanding of other departments.
- Actually review your employee handbook, highlighting key policies and expectations.

Take action:

1. Create a welcome kit for new employees.
2. Define your 90-day onboarding plan for all new hires, with a goal of helping them build connections throughout your organization.



4) Define the path to advancement.

It's a myth that employees are satisfied with the status quo. Almost everyone wants to do better, but they don't always know how.

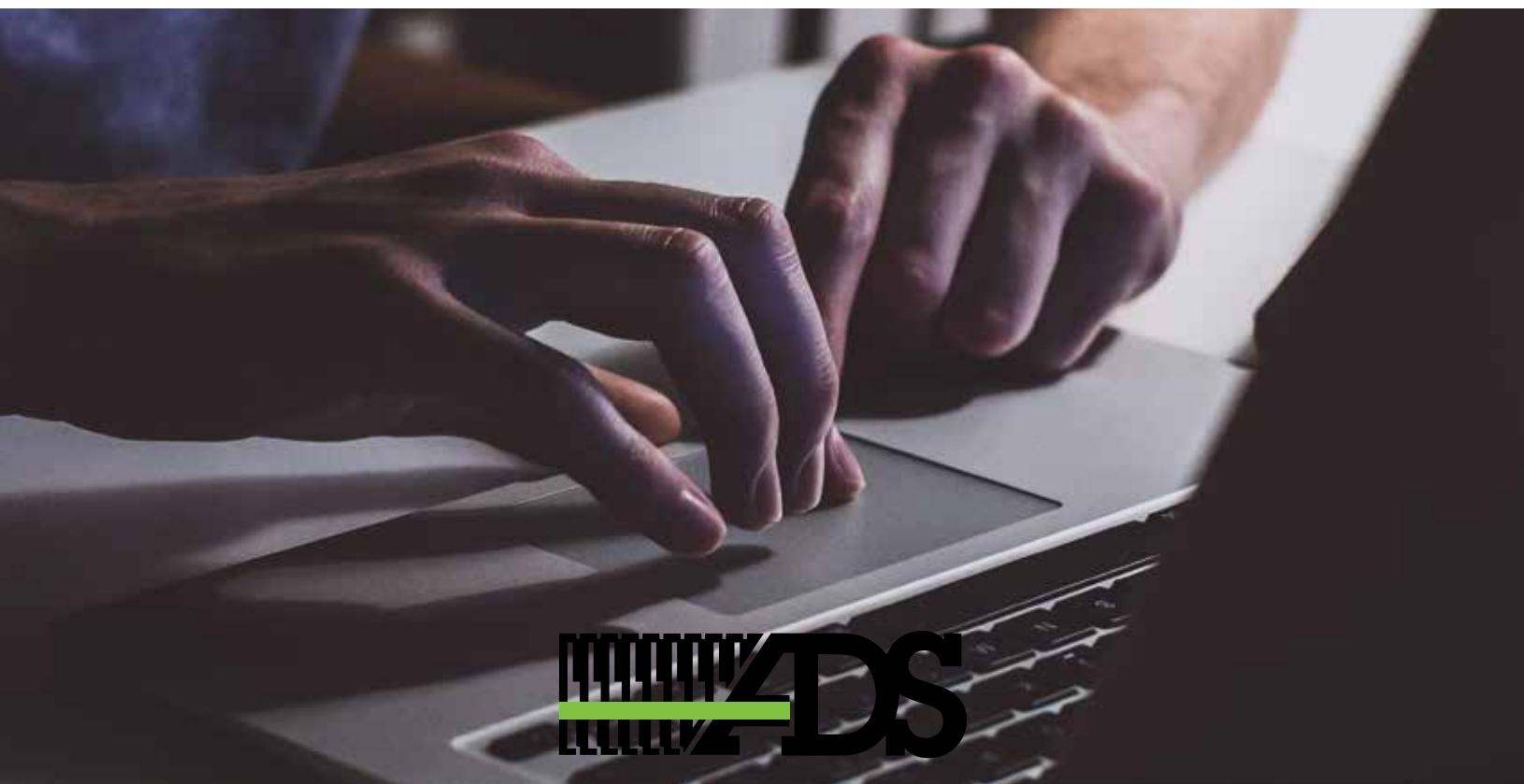
Define how employees can acquire additional skills and training that can help them move up in your organization. Completion of courses and certifications shows commitment to the industry and to your company, so you should encourage these achievements.

- Enroll each employee in on-line training programs which enable training courses to be completed during inclement weather or the off-season.
- Post information on certification programs and pre-requisites required for achieving certification
- Encourage all employees to become bi-lingual with access to appropriate resources.

Identify career paths and milestones for employees. Many newcomers think being a manager is easy. Post the qualifications and duties for different positions in your organization so the knowledge and discipline required for each are clear.

Take action:

1. Develop your company's training resources, including on-line training, classroom training, videos and industry certification courses.
2. Create job descriptions and qualifications required for each role in your organization.



5) Counteract negativity. Celebrate success.

Stop waiting for the annual company picnic to celebrate teamwork and success. Recognize good results and positive attitudes continually.

Little repetitive gestures are appreciated and serve to keep spirits high.

Here are some extra perks that are appreciated from time to time:

- During team meetings and morning "huddles", encourage team members to praise each other for cooperation, helping out and getting the job done right. Managers can set the example, and all can join in.
- Think small incremental rewards. Bring iced beverages or coffees to job sites, or even ice cream treats.
- Buy new uniform apparel, stylish safety glasses or gloves for crew members. Team members who are expected to be professionals need to be outfitted as professionals.
- When specific goals are met, treat the team to bowling, cookouts or lunch.
- Involve families in rewards. Plan family-friendly events. Send home gifts that can be shared with family members, like a "back to school kit" for employees' children or "July Fourth celebration kit". Families make sacrifices when employees have to work longer hours in season.

Take action:

1) Identify ways to demonstrate your appreciation for team members.

2) Plan rewards you can use throughout the busy season.

The Bottom Line: Retention Pays.

When retention increases, companies benefit.

- **Increased efficiency and profitability:** Recruiting and training take time, which cut into opportunities to be efficient in other ways. More importantly, experienced employees make fewer mistakes and get more done.
- **Projects proceed according to plan:** contracting is deadline driven and full of daily challenges. Experienced, motivated team members get more done, making your clients happy and increasing your opportunities for referrals and repeat business.
- **A safer workplace:** Experienced crew members know the safety rules, follow them, and hold their teammates accountable.

**Watch for additional resources
to help you grow your
employee success in the
months ahead.**

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