

Quality in Production: The Human Factor

By Deri Ross Pryor



A machine is only as good as its parts. Even if the machine is designed well, poorly- or non-working parts will render it useless. The same can be applied to the workplace. A business is only as good as its employees. If they aren't up to par, the company will not produce quality outcomes. If those employees have to be constantly replaced, production slows down and become inconsistent in quality.

Quantity vs. Quality?

The laundry and textile business is a fast paced one, but also one that has little room for error. When plugging employees into their positions it is essential to match the right work traits with the job. The question is not quantity vs. quality, but how to find employees that have both. Here are some traits to look for in potential employees or when evaluating the performance of existing ones:

Employees traits for Quantity:

- Ability to multitask
- Good memorization skills
- Punctual
- High energy
- Good physical health

Employees traits for Quality:

- Self-motivated
- Decisive
- Autonomous
- Honest
- Accurate



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Causes of Turnover

If personal reasons, such as moving, starting a family, illness, retirement or restarting studies are not taken into account, the causes of turnover can be summarized into the following seven factors:

1. **Wages:** Employees leave their work position due to low pay (remuneration, benefits, imbalance between performance and reward).
2. A secure future is an important factor having impact on the decision to leave a work position (trust in the company’s vision, following business ethics, trust in leaders/management, new projects and innovation, speed of employee turnover, a vision of the future).
3. **Good relationships at the workplace support employees’ decision to stay with their organization although there are good reasons for leaving (co-operation, treatment, fairness, tolerance, helpfulness, the style of assigning and performing tasks).**
4. Roles and positions (recognition) in the organization have a major impact on work satisfaction (prestige, opportunities, development, recognition).
5. **Communication within the organization and its level also determines work satisfaction (type, feedback, sincerity, ethics, awareness, concealing of information, respecting opinions).**
6. Organizational culture (strong) is a critical factor for an employee’s decision to stay in the work position (workload, flexible working hours, access to sources, type of culture, focus on quality).
7. **The expectation factor determines the length of stay in the work position (imbalance between work and personal life, unclear assignments, expectations, without the support of innovations proposed by employees).**

(note: these aren’t necessarily in weighted order)

From “Staff Turnover as a Possible Threat to Knowledge Loss” by Urbanocová and Linhartová Lucie, Journal of Competitiveness, March 2011.

Employee retention is a complex process. While it is easy to blame poor wages on why employees leave or perform poorly enough to warrant termination, the causes go much deeper than that. In fact, excellent wages are no guarantee that an employee will perform well or stay at a job if he or she feels unsatisfied with the work environment. Avoiding high turnover has little to do with the employee and much to do with the employer.

Employee retention begins with the hiring process. It is important to hire the right person for the right job. Someone may have excellent work ethics and skills, but if he or she isn’t matched to the position hired for, eventually dissatisfaction will rear its ugly head and problems will ensue. Knowing how to spot the right person requires that those responsible for hiring have an excellent understanding of not only the position, but the overall process of the entire company, as well as the long-term desires.

For instance, in the laundry setting, someone may apply for the job who is punctual, conscientious, and has a strong employment history. However, he may not be fast enough on his feet to keep up with production pace or detail oriented enough to make note of defects on textiles that render them unusable, allowing them to go back into circulation. This person may not work well in soil sort or finishing. Perhaps there is another position that will make better use of his talents. Knowing how to make these determinations in the first steps of the hiring process will save headaches and money down the road, for both the employer and employee.

Perhaps the facility is planning on purchasing new equipment that will require employees to learn new procedures. Knowing your existing employees and potential hires at this point is also crucial. Can they learn quickly? Are they receptive to change? How will you make these determinations? An employer must keep an eye on the future when make employee decisions in the present.

Just as one would think about how much room they would need in a new house for future plans, such as marriage, children, and so on, employers must think ahead as to how current employees will fit into long-term plans. Without taking this into consideration, employers may put unfair expectation on employees who cannot fulfill needs they weren’t hired for in the first place. The result is invariably unhappiness on both sides, and an inevitable parting of the ways.

Conversely, employees who feel that they have a future in the facility and who are given a chance to grow are much more likely to stay long-term. Growth means much more than promotions and pay increased. Most people look for opportunities to learn and take on increased

REWARDING LOYALTY

Employees crave recognition, but not all employees want the same thing. Some will look for opportunities for advancement or added responsibility, but what about those who are content with their current position but are doing outstanding work? It is important to recognize them as well and there are various ways to do it.

Incentive programs Monetary bonuses, gift cards, and other prizes are some examples of rewards that employees will appreciate. In this tight economy, wages are used for the necessities. Giving the employee a little extra not only helps out their finances, but can also be a morale booster. A happy employee is a good employee.

Buy-Ins Giving employees the opportunity to invest in their own future is a sure-fire way to ensure that they have the end result in mind when they look at their own performance.

Exposure and Praise The age-old Employee of the Month Wall is still in style. Giving an employee a public pat on the back lets them know that you recognize what they are doing. It also allows other employees to see that their good work won't go unnoticed either.

These are just some ideas. Not sure which way to go? ASK your employees! Nothing helps morale than giving them some control over their own working environment. Let them be creative and don't be afraid to go through some trial and error before you find what works.

responsibilities. They also crave the chance to be involved in the growth process. Being heard in terms of suggestions or complaints makes employees feel they are an important part of the facility's success.

Investing in employees' future in terms of education and training also reduces employee turnover. Formal evaluations of their work is also an important factor, since employees will then feel that not only are their accomplishments being noticed, but areas that need improvement are identified. In short, making them feel as if they are part of a team rather than a faceless cog will foster a sense of loyalty. Loyal employees make for a smooth running operation.

Some turnover is to be expected as the current workforce moves towards retirement. The difficulty with that is a drop in knowledge continuity. The outgoing employees take their knowledge and experience with them, thus it becomes important to ensure that those moving in to their spots have that knowledge passed down to them. Foresight enables management to make plans for this inevitability. Losing employees to retirement or when they move on to other opportunities is not as problematic as those who quit because they are unhappy or are fired for poor performance. Satisfied employees will be much more willing to mentor new ones to ensure continuity of performance.

If a facility is experiencing a high turnover rate, the first step is to talk to the employees. Exit interviews are crucial in determining a pattern in reasons for employee departures. Once a pattern is established, the facility can begin addressing the factors that are contributing to loss.

- Is it an issue of low pay? Perhaps the facility cannot afford to make raises available, but this would be the point to look carefully at processes and equipment to see how to make the facility more cost efficient.
- Is it low job satisfaction? Management may need to take a close look at position requirements and the match to employees in those positions.
- Do the employees simply feel an overwhelming sense of detachment? Regular staff meetings, open door policies and the like may need to be implemented and strengthened to foster a sense of approachability.

For every effect, there is a cause, and as stated before, the employer bears the brunt of responsibility for problems employees are having across the board.

Finding and keeping the best employees for a facility's needs is the key to success. Good employees don't just stumble through the door. They must be recruited and nurtured to excel. Once a good employee is found, keeping them is a matter of giving them a reason to stay. Like all good relationships, this takes ongoing work and attention, both of which pay off in the end.

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