

the staff conundrum

by jennifer blunden

Though good employees have always been in high demand, they are becoming more difficult to attract and retain. Job security is not really an issue for these talented people – they are in short supply and this places them in a powerful position to negotiate terms and conditions and to choose who they work for. Employers need to bear this in mind when seeking to attract and retain the best staff. Businesses should seriously consider adopting flexible work practices.

Attracting staff. Employers don't have to pay the highest salaries to attract the best staff but they do need to provide something of value to employees. You must be prepared to give prospective employees good reasons why they would want to

willing to consider their proposal.

Part-time work. Part-time work is no longer just the domain of women wanting to spend more time with their family – men are also re-evaluating their working hours. Younger employees want a more flexible working environment and stimulating work. Older employees are also looking for more flexibility as they transition towards retirement.

Companies concerned about costs and the full-time head count can minimise both by hiring part-time rather than full-time staff. Not only are salary costs and other employment on-costs reduced, but the part-time worker is often more highly motivated to complete tasks efficiently within their allotted timeframe.

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work for your company. Take time to identify the benefits of working for your organisation before you start recruiting so that you can promote these benefits, attract the best candidates and increase the likelihood of them accepting your offer.

Businesses often forget that the interview process is a “two-way street”. They are in the position of strength up to the point where an offer is made to the preferred candidate. The candidate then decides whether to accept or decline the offer – the power just shifted!

Retaining staff. Companies need to find ways to keep their good people from moving on. The cost of replacing an employee is higher than many companies realise – an estimate of six months’ salary is frequently quoted.

It is too late to initiate a staff retention strategy after your key employees have resigned.


There is an intimate link between flexibility, an increase in loyalty and a reduction in staff turnover. Flexibility shows your staff that the company truly values them and their time.

When requests for more flexible arrangements are made by staff wanting to reduce their hours, you may risk losing them if you are not

Many companies have not considered that senior and executive roles can also be filled on a part-time basis. Recent Australian and US experience has shown that in some companies even the most senior roles, such as CEO, have been held by a part-time executive. A part-time executive appointment can be a cost-effective solution that enables the company to afford a more experienced and qualified candidate.

Working from home. Employees seeking to reduce their hours may consider working from home as an alternative or an adjunct to part-time work. Work-from-home employee arrangements are most successful if the staff member has a good performance record, a proven ability to work unsupervised and their home-based output can be measured. You will also need to consider occupational health and safety issues in relation to their home/office environment.

Casual employment. Casual staff, on a full-time or part-time basis, provide a solution for specific projects, short-term assignments or to cover periods of increased workload. If you are fair and accommodating with your casual staff they are more likely to make themselves available when urgent needs arise.

The need for flexibility. Employers need to recognise and accept the transformation that is occurring in the workforce. There is a greater demand for flexibility – be it through part-time work, working from home, flexible hours or other changes to work practices. If your company can adapt to change and provide a positive and flexible work environment, you will have greater success in attracting and retaining staff. 

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