

## Retain to Gain

Creating the right environment will go a long way toward solving your turnover problem.

**A**s a company, we believe that in order to produce a high-quality job, our own staff of craftsmen and apprentices should complete the carpentry work, rather than subs.

So after ensuring there's adequate work, one of the largest concerns I have as an owner is how to complete the projects. That's where finding and keeping a sharp field staff comes in.

### **HOLD ON**

Locating quality people is an ongoing job. So is retention. Owners can't overlook the responsibility of nurturing the staff they have. When my partner and I started the firm, we wanted to create an

atmosphere where staff feels they are part of our family and knows that we care about their needs at work and at home. We've enjoyed success retaining good employees, and I believe it's because we've provided them with an environment that promotes family first, as well as creating opportunities for growth and advancement.

Good pay and comprehensive benefits are one key to retention. We try to add a

new benefit every year. We currently offer medical, dental, profit sharing through a retirement fund, referral bonuses, paid holidays, five to 10 days vacation, bereavement pay, jury duty pay, professional memberships, subscriptions to periodicals, a tool allowance, and more.

Feedback is another key to retaining your best people. We conduct annual performance evaluations for the staff, which allows us to review the previous year's performance and ensure the individual is on track to meet his or her career goals. Each person completes a self-evaluation form that serves as the agenda. This frank and open discussion is constructive for both the employee and management. There are times when the employee evaluates the owners as much as we review them.

Equally important is the support system we have set in place and the value we put on being honest and fair to everyone we deal with. Our systems promote teamwork and camaraderie. We recently had an employee leave, then return several months later, essentially because he missed the team approach we take. The field staff supports each other with resources such as manpower, methods, materials, and subcontractors.

This is not to say that we have not experienced turnover. Typically, the employee who leaves is either interested in dollars per hour and not benefits or doesn't fit in with our work standards and ethics.

### **FIND, THEN TRAIN**

As an owner who strives for managed growth, I constantly look for new employees. We network through our employees, subs, and suppliers. We run help wanted ads. But these venues are only partly successful.

Our apprenticeship program is another means by which we nurture younger recruits to learn all aspects of remodeling. The apprentices perform more than their share of the demo and digging, but our crew leaders take time daily to ensure their helpers learn something new. Our crew leaders are excellent and patient teachers. We currently have an aspiring young carpenter who has successfully run several small projects and can manage a site in the crew leader's absence for several days.

We combine this learning environment with tuition reimbursement. We currently have two of our staff taking construction technology courses at the local community college. I am also active at our local trade school and sit on the program advisory committee. We sponsor interns during their senior year and provide summer jobs for the students. This avenue will produce quality employees over time.

In order to employ top people, you must first play a role in the future of your current employees and the industry. —*Jim Benoit, CR, is co-owner of Benoit & Czarnecki Design/Construction, a full-service remodeling firm in Newtown Square, Pa.*



Photo: Compoa



### **GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?**

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