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Nonprofit Fiscal Fitness

Blackbaud

a newsletter about issues in the nonprofit business world

Editor's Note

Recruiting and selecting staff can be a big job, and we discussed strategies for hiring procedures in our last newsletter. But organizations would be wasting time and money if they weren't able to retain the qualified employees they put so much effort into hiring. That's why the topic for this month's newsletter is [staff retention](#).

In the nonprofit world, we know that high staff turnover is a fairly common problem, so how can we reverse this trend? In his article *Retaining Quality Staff — How It Benefits Your Organization*, Dr. John Meeker of [Meeker & Associates, Inc.](#) discusses retention strategies, [employee development programs](#), and more.

We'd love to hear from you. Send your thoughts to fiscalfitness@blackbaud.com.



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Retaining Quality Staff — How It Benefits Your Organization

John Meeker, Ph.D.

Recruiting and retaining top-quality staff is the lifeblood of all organizations. This is especially so for nonprofit organizations.

Retaining good employees serves both to develop new staff and empower long-term staff. A good retention strategy will benefit your employees and the various constituencies that your organization serves. Whether your organization is large or small, improving retention requires time, energy, and financial investment. The result of this investment will be an experienced and talented staff that could lead to improved customer service and an enhanced ability to respond to future needs.



Retention of quality employees can be improved by focusing on four strategies:

1. Combine the responsibilities and strategies for recruiting and retaining employees, especially during the first year.
2. Adopt essential best practices for human resources management.
3. Create a professional development program for employees at all levels.
4. Provide essential staffing resources to executive directors and others on the leadership team.

Recruitment and retention are natural extensions of each other. Assign your human resources department the task of designing and implementing a new employee program that would welcome, orient, and engage new employees during their first year of employment. This program should include these essential practices:

1. Orchestrate meetings between new employees and senior leadership directors.
2. Conduct quarterly reviews to ensure a fit between expectations and performance.
3. Encourage a relationship between new employees and senior staff by creating a mentor program.

Best practices for human resources should be implemented. Some will require financial investment and others will require equally valuable resources of time and energy.

1. Create accurate, up-to-date job descriptions to ensure clarity of expectations.
2. Complete annual performance reviews for all positions.
3. Develop a comprehensive flexible benefits plan and a thorough orientation that ensures employees are informed and encouraged to utilize benefits — especially those designed to improve health and reduce job-related stress and burnout.
4. Encourage a balance between professional responsibilities and other life commitments.
5. Conduct employee satisfaction surveys and exit interviews to gain perspective on the employee's opinion about the work environment so that future appropriate improvements can be made.
6. When an employee is not the right fit for your organization, promptly implement appropriate administrative actions. Most organizations delay too long, which only serves to de-motivate other highly valuable employees.
7. Use outside services and consultants to provide expertise that might not be available within your organization.

Employee Development Programs

Provide professional development programs at all levels:

1. Encourage staff participation in academic courses or degrees appropriate to your organization's mission.
2. Augment your current in-house training program by utilizing outside service providers. Employees can gain valuable insight by participating in courses with other similar nonprofit professionals.
3. Implement monthly staff meetings for the entire organization or in the largest group possible. The agenda should include recognition of quality performance from each major department, milestones accomplished, and summary reports from clients who benefited from your organization's mission. It should also celebrate anniversaries of employment to further highlight the value of retention.
4. Encourage your employees to read professional literature and books related to the nonprofit field. For example, *When Generations Clash* by Lynn C. Lancaster and David Stillman is an excellent book for those who work with, service, or raise funds from individuals in different generations.



Anecdotal perceptions, backed by growing research, demonstrate that there is an appalling turnover rate among nonprofit professionals. It is no surprise, then, that nonprofit executives have an increased responsibility in employee development programs.

1. Board directors must encourage professional relationships among staff, utilize succession practices, and ensure equity in compensation and benefits compared to similar jobs in the market.
2. Funding sources must support appropriate infrastructures to include accountable reporting, expert and effective fundraising tools, and leadership development resources.
3. Executive directors must not only develop productive working relationships with their board, but they should also seek professional resources by meeting with nonprofit colleagues and attending events, such as conferences and seminars.

If recruitment and retention are the lifeblood of organizations, nonprofits must reverse the loss of executive leadership and other valuable staff. Focusing energy, time, and financial resources on retention will benefit your staff, your organization's work environment, and ultimately help forward your organization's mission.

About the Author

John Meeker, Ph.D. is the founder and president of Meeker & Associates, an executive search practice for education companies and nonprofits that provides staff development consulting and executive coaching. Dr. Meeker can be reached at his corporate office in Minneapolis, Minnesota at 952.921.3262. To learn more about the company, visit www.johnmeeker.com.

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in the news

[Foundation Giving Grew at Steady, Moderate Pace in 2005](#)

Giving by the nation's 68,000 grantmaking foundations grew to \$33.6 billion in 2005. The steady but unremarkable growth in foundation giving was reflected in funders' grantmaking strategies. [Read the entire article here.](#)

[Deciding On Headquarters Tests Financial Decisions](#)

There are a number of factors to consider when a nonprofit must decide to own or lease — including the size, finances, and short and long-term space needs. [Read the entire article from *The Nonprofit Times*.](#)



resources

[Financial Edge Clients: Interested In Meeting Other Financial Edge Users?](#)

Blackbaud user groups are top-notch educational forums designed for Blackbaud clients. Learn and share knowledge and experience with other nonprofits in your community, as well as with Blackbaud representatives. Contact us at usergroups@blackbaud.com for more information on attending or hosting one.

[Making Your 990 Work For You](#)

Here are some tips from Guidestar® for getting the most out of your organization's 990. All you need is a little assistance and a new way to look at the forms!

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