

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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What Employees Want

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Most growers I talk to say it's people, not pests, that keep them up at night. The list of HR issues you face every day is a long one: minimum wage, overtime rules, finding enough good people, the cost of health care and other benefits ... I could go on and on. Yet without people, you're out of business, right?

So, if you have to have employees, you want them to be as happy, productive and loyal as possible. Productive employees can lift a company to new heights. Happy employees provide better customer service and reflect positively on your business. Miserable ones, conversely, drag down their fellow employees, you and your whole operation.

Certainly, if you've got employees who aren't cutting it and wouldn't cut it even if you paid them a million dollars, get rid of them. "Hire fast and fire faster" is sound advice. But for those who are worth keeping, it behooves you to do everything in your power to give them what they need to be happy on the job.

What is it they want? In a recent Forbes' column, career coach Ashley Stahl listed the five things that employees tell her are their top five factors when it comes to taking—or leaving—a job.

1. A good salary. Fact: Money is the No. 1 reason most of us get up and go to work. If your employees are worrying about paying their bills, they're not giving you 100%. And they probably have one eye out for a new job that pays more. I was told you should pay people enough so that they're not constantly thinking about money. How much is that? It's an amount that would be hard for them to earn elsewhere. That could be as little as a dollar an hour for entry-level workers. If you pay \$10 and every place else pays \$9, why would they leave? (unless it's for one of the next four factors). If you only pay \$9 because that's the going rate, then "going" is just what your employees might be doing. You'll attract more job seekers, too, when word gets out.

2. Good health insurance. If you don't already offer some sort of insurance benefit, me saying you should isn't going to make it happen. Certainly, always watch for affordable opportunities such as insurance pools, high-deductible catastrophic policies or associations that offer insurance or advice. But if you can't offer

insurance, you can offer health and wellness benefits, such as flexible sick time, fitness or yoga classes, lunchtime walks, nutritional coaching and so on. Showing employees you care about their health will go a long way in building loyalty.

3. Work-life balance. Employers too often have a clock-watching mentality: “I pay them for eight hours, I expect them to be working their tails off for eight hours.” But really, aren’t we also paying for expertise, experience and results? That great customer service person can earn his or her week’s pay with one good phone call. So why harass them to meet a quota just to fill time? Personally, I believe schedule flexibility is the second most important benefit behind the paycheck itself. Give your folks the flexibility to come in late, leave early or take a long lunch for a dentist appointment. They’ll appreciate it and do better work when they’re at work.

4. Opportunities for advancement and professional development. You should train all your employees. “Yeah, but what if I train them and they leave?” you ask. My retort: “What if you don’t train them and they stay?” Everybody wants to grow in their job and career. You should spend time thinking about each employee and how you can help them grow personally and within your organization. If you don’t, they’ll find an employer who will.

5. A sense of purpose. This one is actually pretty easy. We beautify the world. We clean the air and provide oxygen to breathe. We reduce crime, help sick people heal, add joy to holidays and lift the spirits of those who are down. Our wholesome product might be one reason some of your people chose you over the factory or fast food joint down the road. That’s why you should embrace, celebrate and promote the positive attributes of your green business. It’s a great way to lure good, caring people to work for you.

Once they’re in the door, it’s up to you to keep them from leaving. **GT**