

# Keeping Your Best & Brightest Workers

**First understand why they leave.  
Then use these tips to make sure they stay.**

By Wendi Everton



Your employees leave for many reasons. You can't do much to keep an employee from leaving to take care of an ill family member or because a spouse is being transferred. But at other times, there's a lot you can do to keep an employee.

## Dissatisfaction with the Job

One reason that both paid and volunteer workers leave is because they don't like the job. They may be bored, overwhelmed, or mismatched to the job requirements. Some strategies from the academic literature can help.

Consider whether there's a job somewhere else in your organization that would better suit the employee. Sometimes the limitations a worker brings to one job become strengths in another.

There are two ways to redesign a job to make it more appealing.

For example, you may have an employee whose perfectionism causes unacceptable delays. But you may have another job that requires careful, methodical work. An internal transfer will provide a better fit between the person and the job.

You can also tinker with the job

itself to change it into something the employee likes to do. There are two ways to redesign a job to make it more appealing:

**1. Job rotation** involves having several people share several jobs. They rotate who does each job, changing every month or so. The benefit is that if there's an unappealing job that no one enjoys, one person isn't stuck doing it permanently. Additionally, you have a work crew who can easily slip into any of several jobs when you're short-handed.

**2. Job enrichment** means that you add more complexity to a job. For example, you might give a receptionist computer training. The money you spend in training will be well worth it when you end up with a happier employee. Not only will you make the job more interesting, but the training itself becomes a perk.

## Dissatisfaction with the Organization

Many people leave jobs because they aren't happy with the organization. Often this happens because there has been a violation of what researchers call the "psychological contract." The idea of the psychological contract is that when employees begin work, they have expectations about what they'll give to and receive from the organization. You can think of these expectations as implied promises your organization has made to the employee. For example, when nurses join a hospital that has a reputation of fine care,

they'll expect to be supported in the mission of providing such care.

As a manager, you must learn what you've promised in your psychological contracts to employees. To do so, ask yourself some questions. What do your recruiting advertisements say? What does your mission statement say? What does your documentation (employee manual, marketing materials, etc.) say? What behaviors are rewarded and punished? What's promised during employment interviews? Finally and crucially, does what you do match with what you say you do? If not, research has shown that your worker will feel disillusioned and seek employment elsewhere.

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## Dissatisfaction with Pay

Some people who leave nonprofit organizations do so for better pay. This is a sticky problem, because you probably don't have much discretionary money to increase salaries. You do have some advantages over for-profit organizations, however, that you can use to keep people from leaving.

First, you may have—or be able to develop—wonderful benefits that are competitive. Working in a flex-

ible workplace that lets people run personal errands or change their schedules easily is one example. Others include generous vacation time, an informal culture reflected in a casual dress code, and a personal-development plan that offers courses, workshops, and specialized training.

You have an even stronger advantage over for-profit firms, however, because you already know what many of your people find rewarding. You know they've chosen your organization because they want to make a difference in someone's life. That's what they crave. To ensure that they'll continue to find their work meaningful and motivating, give them feedback about when a client or customer has received excellent service. Point out how their work has helped those your organization serves. Celebrate employees' successes, particularly in how they've bettered people's lives.

### If You Must Say Good-Bye

No matter what you do, some employees will leave. Wish them well, and support their choice. Hold an exit interview to find out exactly why the person is leaving and what you can do differently next time.

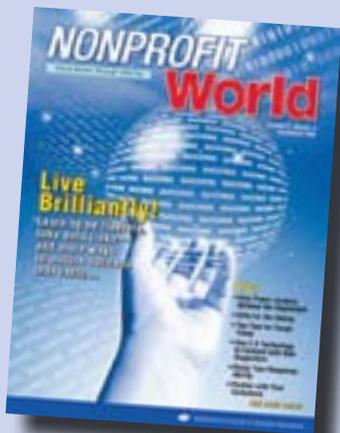
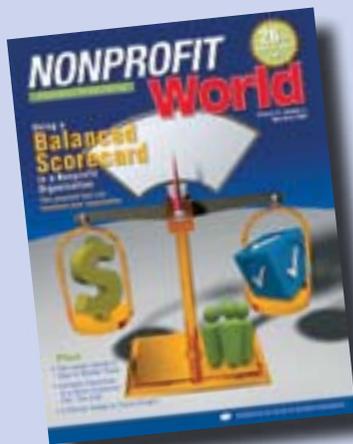
If you treat people well during the resignation and exit process, at worst you'll have a community member who will provide you with free word-of-mouth recruiting. At best, that employee may come back to you. ■

*Wendi Everton (evertonw@easternct.edu) is an associate professor of psychology at Eastern Connecticut State University. Her specialty is industrial and organizational psychology, which applies psychological principles to help understand workplace issues. Along with her colleagues and students, Dr. Everton has performed a number of employee opinion surveys in nonprofit organizations.*

### The Must List

Use these resources (available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members)) to encourage your best workers to stay with your organization:

- **Vacation Time: More than an Administrative Matter** (Vol. 24, No. 2)
- **How to Use Organizational Culture as a Competitive Tool** (Vol. 20, No. 2)
- **Don't Let "Sick" Workers Undermine Your Organization** (Vol. 23, No. 1)
- **Why Your Employees Are Losing Motivation—and What to Do about It** (Vol. 27, No. 3)
- **Training Programs Need More than Good Information** (Vol. 21, No. 2)
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