

Create a Greenhouse to Grow Your Employees

by Mike Mitchell

Does your organization provide opportunities for employees to develop personally? Terri Kabachnick, author of I Quit, But Forgot to Tell You, shares the results of a survey of 1400 executives, managers, and associates: 76% would switch jobs for less money in order to work for a company that offers personal development and flexibility. Do you know how many of your employees feel the same way?

To create a greenhouse to grow employees requires a financial investment by the company. Ms. Kabachnick relates this fact based on an Accenture/Deloitte study: The typical U.S. company spends 50 times more to hire a \$100K worker than it will invest in annual training after he joins the company.

Okay, so maybe that's not the typical telecom analyst salary but the point is well made: it costs more to hire a new employee than to train (and retain) a current employee. The next logical questions are who to train and how to train them.

How To You Decide Who Gets the Development Opportunity

My observations, research, and experience leads me to the conclusion that employees can be grouped into several categories:

- Shining Stars – employees with a can-do attitude who take initiative, and produce excellent results.
- Rising Stars – these employees have the potential to be Shining Stars but are not there yet.
- Falling Stars – employees who just go through the motions, frequently complain, and not are very thorough or conscientious in completing their tasks.

Now ask yourself—Which category of employee would have the greatest negative impact on your department if they left your company? Obviously, the Shining Stars are the workers you want to keep. They are the ones who should be rewarded with opportunities for development. Now the question is—How can you provide opportunities with little or no training budget?

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Two Development Options: Coaching and Training

Coaching

This is a low cost/high involvement option you should explore. Coaching is an ongoing activity where the coach (manager) works with employees to provide opportunities to stretch their skills and expand their experience. Some examples of development coaching are:

- Discuss employee goals and interests to find opportunities to promote development.
- Look for special projects to give the Shining Star a chance to learn new skills.
- Incorporate the Shining Star into some of your activities to increase his visibility and exposure to new people and network of contacts.

Training

Training is a one-time event with specific time duration and measurable results. In telecom, training is usually equated with technical skills but soft skills must be included as well. Some low cost or nominal cost training opportunities are:

- Self study courses – CompTIA is a resource for self-study courses.
- Group study – use the self-study resources to form a group training session.
- Local colleges – usually this option is more expensive but includes instructor expertise.
- One-day seminars – many companies offer time management, communication skills, customer service skills, and more for around \$200.

I know one PC repair person who wanted more knowledge than the on-the-job training he received. He bought the CompTIA A+ certification manual for less than \$100 and studied for 6 months. He passed the test with no problem. It can be done!

As technological advances become such common occurrences, the demand for technical talent will continue to increase. Don't find yourself paying the high cost of hiring new employees. With a little effort and encouragement on your part, your Shining Stars might remain loyal fans of both you and your company.

-Mike