



# Employee Retention Guide:

How to keep your  
top talent on board

[aicpa.org/worklife](https://aicpa.org/worklife)



The AICPA, through its Women's Initiatives Executive Committee, is dedicated to helping CPAs and organizations recruit and retain the best talent by providing resources like this guide. For more information on career development initiatives and resources, visit [aicpa.org/worklife](https://aicpa.org/worklife).

## RECRUITING AND RETENTION STRATEGIES



One question all employers have asked themselves is, “How do we keep top performers?” This is especially crucial right now, with the desire for good talent at an all-time high, and fierce competition for that limited talent pool. Therefore, employers need to develop strategies for recruiting the right people — and retaining their current high performers.

When studying employers of choice, there are certain employment practices they have in common:

- Giving employees the responsibility and authority to get things done
- Treating employees with respect and trust
- Providing feedback on performance and recognizing achievement
- Dedicating thought and resources to promoting high morale
- Hiring the right people

Read on for ideas and strategies — low-cost, medium-cost and long-term — frequently used by employers of choice. Often, the least expensive, easiest programs are the most motivating and meaningful to employees.

## Low Cost

- Showing appreciation and recognition for a job well done
  - Personalized thank-you notes from supervisors
  - Congratulatory notes sent home to spouses/families
  - Personalized voicemails/messages from management team
  - Periodic day(s) off to recognize good performance
  - Spot rewards (e.g., gift certificates for completion of large projects)
  - Recognize professional milestones: celebrate a promotion or years of service
- Recognizing personal/family milestones
  - Wedding gifts
  - Baby gifts
  - College survival packages for college-age children
  - Get-well cards/flowers
  - Birthday cards, gifts, or celebrations



## SIX PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATORS

Essentially, each individual is motivated by the same six professional motivators; however, team members will rank them differently. To motivate your team members, find out how each of them ranks the six motivators and then develop individual, organizational and team programs based on the results.

The Six Professional Motivators are:

- Acknowledgement and respect
- Camaraderie and fun
- Compensation
- Flexibility and time off
- Increased responsibility and challenge
- Personal development

Check out the “Six Motivators Calculation Tool” by Convergence Coaching in the Team Development section of the PCPS Human Capital Center to find out what makes your team tick. [pcps.aicpa.org/](http://pcps.aicpa.org/)

Source: *Journal of Career Planning and Employment*



- Providing voluntary benefits: programs that can be set up with a payroll deduction; no cost to employer other than administering the program
  - Auto and home insurance plans
  - Legal insurance
  - Long-term care insurance
  - Pet insurance
  - Travel insurance
  - Discount vision plans
  - Disability programs
  - Section 529 (college savings plans)
- Providing perks: discounts through clients or local merchants
  - Discounts for museums/local attractions
  - Retail store discounts
  - Computer purchase discounts



## RETENTION THROUGH COMPENSATION

It's impossible to consider your organization's retention strategies without also looking at your compensation package. Every compensation plan should be constructed to help the firm achieve its strategic goals and to attract, reward and retain the right people. If the plan does not accomplish these two objectives, it should be restructured. Keep in mind the following when implementing a pay-for-performance system:

1. Establish fundamentals, like who will administer the plan, eligibility requirements, tracking results, etc.
2. Ensure the plan is win-win-win for each of the three critical stakeholders: clients, employees and suppliers.
3. Use satisfiers (which attract and retain) and motivators (which drive people to improve performance).
4. Get owners, employees, or both, involved in the design.
5. Balance rewards for results and effort.
6. Identify measures, define targets and track performance.
7. Create high trust between owners and employees. Low trust can kill a compensation plan.
8. Avoid side or one-off agreements to prevent different classes of citizens in your firm.
9. Recommit and re-engage everyone in the first year. If there are problems with the initial design, explore them and make the necessary modifications.
10. Budget for bonuses. A modest budget for bonuses is advisable. If all owners and staff in a firm achieve their goals, the financial results should be there to support more significant bonuses.
11. Communicate. Be sure to allocate sufficient time to explain the program, answer questions and allow individuals to see the differences between the current and past plans.

For more information and guidance on implementing a customized pay-for-performance system, visit the Rewards, Compensation and Incentives section of the PCPS Human Capital Center at [pcps.aicpa.org](http://pcps.aicpa.org).

- Providing workplace conveniences
  - Direct deposit
  - On-site ATM
  - On-site dry cleaning pickup
  - Assistance with tax preparation
  - Assistance with financial planning
  - Parking spots for expectant moms
  - Shipping services for personal items, e.g., firm UPS/FedEx on-site pickup (cost paid by employee)
  - Parenting guide: tips to help new parents successfully return from a leave of absence
  - Lactation rooms
  - Casual dress policies

- Having fun at work
  - Recognize birthdays/anniversaries/retirements/promotions
  - End of engagement/tax season parties
  - Holiday parties and holiday gift certificates
  - Opening day baseball parties
  - Halloween parties
  - Picnics
  - Golf outings
  - Arrange for the Good Humor truck to stop by the office on summer Fridays
  - Games and competitions
- Tax season stress-relievers
  - “Wear your slippers to work” day
  - Professional head and neck massages
  - Handwriting analysis
  - Miniature golf in office
  - Partner-prepared breakfasts
  - Ice cream Thursdays
  - Starbucks coffee breaks
  - Milk and cookies afternoon break
  - St. Patrick’s Day breakfast
  - Meals prepared by a professional chef
- Supporting employees through times of personal crisis
  - Personal loans during emergencies
  - Childcare and eldercare resource and referral services
  - Employee Assistance Programs: subsidizing referrals to counseling services (e.g., paying for first 5 visits)
  - Emergency back-up childcare services (if usual arrangements fail; paid by employee or employer)





## Medium Cost

- Showing appreciation and recognition for a job well done
  - Bonuses for passing firm-sponsored certifications (CPA Exam, BVA, CITP, PFS, etc.)
- Supporting family needs through benefit programs and work/life effectiveness
  - Adoption benefits
  - Flexible benefits
    - Dependent care assistance (childcare and eldercare services)
    - Medical care reimbursement
- Providing workplace conveniences
  - On-site workout equipment/athletic membership reimbursement program
  - On-site Saturday day care (during annual report/tax season)
- Encouraging professional training and development and/or personal growth opportunities
  - Sabbatical programs
  - Professional Development accounts — setting aside a specific amount of dollars an employee can use for various forms of professional development not covered by traditional CPE (e.g., professional speaking coach)
  - Individualized career guidance and development



## Long-term Strategies

- Promoting work/life effectiveness
  - Develop Flexible Schedules
    - Telecommuting
    - Part-time schedules
    - Job sharing
    - Extended leaves of absence
  - Coverage for CPE and license renewal during the leave
    - Support for partnership opportunities on a reduced schedule
  - Develop Support Services
    - On-site, year-round day care
- Creating a management style and culture understanding of employee needs
  - Listen well and show interest in ideas
  - Embrace new ideas and reward risk-taking
  - Show support for personal initiative
  - Promote creativity

## RETAINING TOP TALENT

Managers and staff often have different ideas about why employees choose to stay with a company. In the 2006 PCPS Top Talent Survey, partners and staff responded with their Top 5 lists:

### Why top talent stays

1. Respect for company mission statement
2. Career growth opportunities
3. Salary
4. Open-door/accessible management style
5. Interesting/challenging projects

### Why partners believe their top talent stays

1. Salary
2. Career growth opportunities
3. Respect for company mission statement
4. Interesting, challenging projects
5. Medical benefits

To learn more about why talented professionals choose to stay or leave, check out the Top Talent Survey at [pcps.aicpa.org/](http://pcps.aicpa.org/)



- Encouraging training, development and personal growth
  - Create mentoring programs
  - Create ongoing performance feedback programs
  - Ensure every staff member has the tools to achieve their professional goals
  - Afford employees the ability to attend training whenever the need arises
  - Optimize staff interests and talents
  - Pay for certain master’s degree programs
  - Provide vocational counseling
  - Support educational leaves of absence
  - Offer individualized career guidance and development
  
- Creating an environment of trust
  - Create suggestion committees
  - Provide a problem-resolution policy
  - Implement an open-door communication policy
  - Regularly provide updates on firm goals and activities
    - Management communications
    - Intranet that provides access to information 24/7
    - Newsletters and updates
  
- Hiring the right people from the outset
  - Make sure all new hires fit with the culture of your organization: assess the candidates’ personality and leadership characteristics
  - Provide referral bonuses for successful hires
  - Train managers on good interviewing and management techniques
  - Accelerate successful on-boarding and assimilation
  - Develop an internship program to recruit the right college graduates



### PCPS HUMAN CAPITAL CENTER

The Center has a library of resources devoted to recruiting and retention, including:

- The Six Motivators Assessment Tool
- Top Talent Study
- Behavioral-Based Interviewing
- Personality Assessment Tool
- Performance Management
- Incentive-Based Compensation Models
- Guide to Building a Mentoring Program

Visit [pcps.aicpa.org](http://pcps.aicpa.org) for even more tools and information!



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