

How Do Companies Retain Their Best Employees? Here Is One Surprising Answer.

By Carl Hyland, Vice President, Membership Development, CRN

If you think of the world as one big focus group, you can learn from surprising answers.

Which brings us to nutrition industry executives. When I ask them to name the greatest benefits to their organizations by being members of industry trade associations, I am frequently surprised and pleased by their answer: "Membership helps me retain my best employees."

I remember the first (and very successful) executive who answered me this way. She encouraged connections between her staff and the staff at CRN. She regarded CRN resources as a source of indirect but powerful professional development for her team. These resources were always available and most had no cost beyond corporate membership dues.

She recognized she could satisfy the powerful desires of her best employees for professional development by encouraging their involvement with their industry trade associations. So what do they want? To collaborate on projects with a higher purpose, to contribute to an industry cause, and to solve larger industry problems. All the things a good trade association does.

I read recently a report by management consulting group Robert Half International on the benefits of professional development. They echoed what industry executives have told me. According to the report, providing staff development opportunities:

1. Increases the collective knowledge of your team
2. Boosts employees' job satisfaction
3. Makes your company more appealing
4. Attracts the right kind of in-demand candidates
5. Aids your retention strategy
6. Makes succession planning easier

For smaller companies where one employee wears many hats, the interactions that come from trade association involvement permit them to collaborate with colleagues in the industry who have the same interests and responsibilities as they do. This may



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reduce their inclination to move on to another employer. For larger companies, employee involvement assures they have input into industry policy decisions.

One thing is for sure: this industry has a lot of passion—for our products, for our brands, and for our philosophy of pro-active wellness. Think of the energy, passion and connections at Expo West and SupplySide West. By channeling that enthusiasm toward industry-wide projects and initiatives, employers satiate the longing of your staffs to participate in a noble cause for which they feel so passionately.

For Millennials, job satisfaction can be a more important motivator than salary. Findings from Bridge, an employee development suite for businesses, show 86 percent of Millennials surveyed agreed that if they had "career training and development" through their employers, they wouldn't leave their jobs. If a job lacks growth opportunities and

avenues for leadership development, 67 percent of Millennials would leave that position (Bridge). And according to Gallup analytics, Millennials rank opportunities to learn and grow in a job above all other considerations. Millennial turnover costs the U.S. economy \$30.5 billion annually.

Trade association engagement can uniquely address those needs of your younger workforce. The collaboration in a collegial, problem-solving setting, usually free of the hierarchical restrictions of their jobs, can make Millennials feel more empowered. The variety of webinars and in-person education provided by trade associations can foster professional growth as Millennials look for meaning and context for their careers.

Occasionally, industry executives tell me they don't want their employees on trade association committees because their employees are already too busy.

However, the truth is, effective engagement with a trade association saves time rather than expends it. For instance, trade associations provide external sources of intelligence and information, let companies try out new ideas, and provide a force multiplier when industry peers join together in common cause to solve a problem. These benefits are widely known among companies who value their trade association membership. What those savvy companies may not recognize, though, is that great employees are empowered by engaging with a great trade association, and membership may provide an unmatched retention tool.

Now there's a focus group insight worth applying.



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