

Employer of choice

How to create a culture that attracts and retains the best and brightest employees **Interviewed by Sue Ostrowski**

Becoming an employer of choice can help a company attract and retain the brightest employees, best its competitors and build a reputation as an excellent employer.

But it takes more than just saying it. Instead, employers have to prove every day that they value their employees, says Brendan Prebo, executive director at ASG Renaissance.

“An employer of choice is a company that has practices in place that promote a healthy, forward-looking and encouraging environment for its employees,” says Prebo. “Employees are looking for employers that allow them to think outside the box, that present a clear vision of where they want to take the company and provide employees with proper training for the job to hire and retain the best people. As a result, workers choose that employer when presented with other choices of employment, self-employment or retirement.”

Smart Business spoke with Prebo about how to become an employer of choice.

How can a company begin to develop its brand to become an employer of choice?

First, it's important to realize that becoming an employer of choice is a strategy, not a tactic, and it needs to be a strategic imperative. The traditional view of HR is that it is a support function. But really good, really progressive companies — the ones that highly skilled, talented workers want to work for — have taken a new view of HR. At these companies, the head of HR sits at the table and is part of developing the strategic direction for the company.

Becoming recognized as an employer of choice requires a companywide effort, and companies must start internally. This means recognizing that their employees are their most valuable resources. Therefore, employers should take a close look at what is not working within their company before beginning to do any external marketing. At the same time, employers can't be all things to all people, so it's important to focus on the things that are important to your top performers.

It's also important to communicate to employees the company's goal of becoming recognized as an employer of choice so they understand the importance of this designation to the overall success of the company, and they can support the company in its efforts.



Brendan Prebo
Executive director
ASG Renaissance

Employers also need to be consistent in their message and how they present it. Potential employees will be looking at an employer's website, and its Facebook and LinkedIn pages. They perform online searches, so if you have a statement on your website that says you value diversity, you need to make sure that is represented in your brand.

What kinds of things help an employer attract and retain the best employees?

Employees are looking for exciting and challenging work; career growth, learning and development; great people to work with; a good relationship with their supervisors and peers; and a company that values its employees. Compensation is an important factor, as well, but money as a motivator only creates short-term results. You may be able to attract a great employee by offering that person a large salary, or keep an employee who might otherwise leave by offering that person a raise. But money is a short-term solution.

For lasting results, you need to look elsewhere. That means providing employees with meaningful work, encouraging them to take risks and think outside the box, having a clear vision of where the company is headed, providing employees with proper training for their jobs and setting and clearly

communicating performance expectations that align with the company's goals. It also means encouraging employees to continue to learn and develop their job skills, providing good leadership at every level and taking the personal needs of employees into account by offering flexible work schedules.

What are the benefits of doing these things to become an employer of choice?

Companies that are recognized as being employers of choice have an advantage in attracting and retaining the best talent. They have a more productive, motivated and committed work force, which directly benefits their customers and their brand, enhancing their competitive position and helping to build a sustainable business.

Highly skilled talent is very much in demand, and jobs in areas such as engineering, software development and project management are tough to fill. Employers need to become an employer of choice to attract that highly skilled talent, not just someone to fill a seat.

What would you say to employers who say they don't need to worry about this, and their employees should just be happy to have a job?

The days of command and control are over. If you have an aging work force, you may still be able to function that way, but younger workers are not going to stay with that kind of employer. Also, employers can't afford to have unhappy employees anymore. In today's world of social media, word travels fast, and potential employees are more knowledgeable than ever about which companies are the best ones to work for.

In addition to the loss of benefits the companies can realize by becoming an employer of choice, companies can also harm themselves by letting dysfunctional work environments go unchecked. Uncooperative, unmotivated and unresponsive employees harm companies in two ways. First is the poor performance that results, but more important is the fact that they affect everyone around them, causing your best employees to leave for better-run and better-managed companies.

By becoming an employer of choice, you will create an environment where your best employees will thrive and that will attract the best and brightest in the market. <<

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