



The Effective Organization

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7 Things You Should Communicate

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It's not enough to say that if you want to keep the best people when the economy improves, you just need to communicate more. It matters what you say and how and when you say it. Communication occurs in the context that you've created over time, and how your communications will be received will depend a great deal on that context. If you want to keep your best people, then you need to do your homework. (Or, conversely, if you want to recruit someone else's key people, find companies that did not do the homework suggested in this article.)

Fortunately, it isn't terribly difficult to communicate better. It does, however, require recognizing that emotion, not logic, is the driving force, and it requires starting now — not next week, next month, or next year. If you wait until people are leaving, it's too late.

So how do you highlight someone's contributions? I offer more detailed suggestions in the [Journal of Corporate Recruiting Leadership](#), but for now, I suggest the following in brief.

Take the opportunity to praise them in public. Note that this does not mean comparing them to others on the team; that only creates resentment and embarrassment for all concerned.

Talk about the importance of the effort they've put in, and find small ways of demonstrating your appreciation. It doesn't have to be fancy, especially in a time of tight budgets. Honest appreciation goes a long way.

The next step in keeping people is to make sure that their contributions are not just recognized, but are also important. Visible contributions that are not valued by the company are not going to be very compelling. Likewise, contributions that someone does not perceive as important will not serve to keep them at the company.

A cousin of mine worked for NASA in the early 1970s. He was part of the team designing the space shuttle. Due to security issues, he and his team had no idea what part of the shuttle they were working on; it was the quintessential "clean room" project, where they would be given instructions and specifications, but no context. When the day of the grand unveiling arrived, he found out that he had been designing the door lock. He walked out of the unveiling and out of NASA.

If you want to keep someone, make sure you frequently highlight how their work fits into the long-term vision of the company. Help them see that their

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work matters to the team and the company. Build a sense of partnership and status. They're not a hired mercenary; they're a trained professional providing

valuable services. Again, demonstrate appreciation whenever possible. Find ways to reward people for their efforts, but don't make the rewards the point of the work.

Make people feel competent and appreciated. No one likes being reminded of embarrassing incidents, of failures, of things that didn't work out well. On the flip side, practically everyone loves to be reminded of successes. As the old saying goes: nothing succeeds like success. As the lesser-known corollary goes, nothing keeps people at your company from leaving like the feeling that they're in an environment where they'll be successful.

Although the corollary lacks the pithy ring of the original saying, it is nonetheless valid. Create an environment where people can see their own competence and measure their own success toward creating something larger than themselves, and you've gone a long way toward keeping them at your company. And, of course, providing opportunities for growth also helps build that feeling of competence and further increases the attractiveness of staying. An additional side effect is that the more competent people feel, the

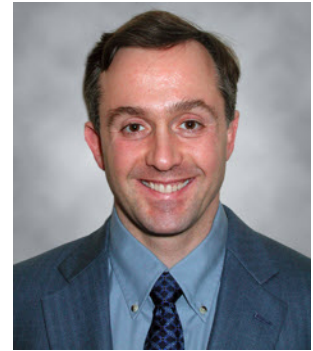
more secure they feel. The more secure they feel, the harder it is for someone else to pry them away.

So yes, in the end it really is all about communications, provided that you are communicating the right things. Think about how you are communicating the following things:

- * Your recognition of the contributions of your employees
- * Your appreciation for their contributions and the personal sacrifices they are making
- * Your own enthusiasm, excitement, and positive vision of the company and its future
- * The goals of the company and how each employee fits into bringing those goals to life
- * The common ground and ideals that will unify your team
- * The information your employees need to work and grow most effectively
- * The feedback that will make your employees feel successful

If you can address those seven points, odds are you'll keep your top people as the economy improves.

About 7 Steps Ahead



Stephen R. Balzac is a consultant, professional speaker and president of 7 Steps Ahead, specializing in helping businesses increase revenue and grow their client base.

Steve has over twenty years of experience in the high tech industry and is the former Director of Operations for Silicon Genetics, in Redwood City, CA.

Steve is a contributing author to *Ethics and Game Design: Teaching Values Through Play* and the author of *The 36-Hour Course on Organizational Development*, due out later this year from McGraw-Hill.

He serves on the board of the New England Society of Applied Psychology (NESAP) and is the president of the Society of Professional Consultants (SPC). Steve is a member of the Operations Committee of the American Judo & Jujitsu Federation. No stranger to the challenges of achieving peak performance under competitive and stressful conditions, he holds a fourth degree black belt in jujitsu and is a former nationally ranked competitive fencer. Steve is an adjunct professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology and has been a guest lecturer at MIT and WPI.

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