

Self-Coach to Boost Retention

Mike Prokopeak - 1/5/11

With the job outlook improving, recession-weary workers may be gearing up to leave your organization. Creating a self-coaching program may help re-engage high potentials tired of doing more with less.



Recent job growth is good news for the economy but potentially bad news for your organization. After more than two years of little or no opportunities, your high-potential talent might be ready to bolt. Implementing development programs to re-engage them, such as self-coaching, could convince them to stay.

According to figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the quits rate, defined as the rate at which workers voluntarily leave their jobs, has steadily climbed throughout 2010 after dropping to a low in October 2009. In the fourth quarter of 2010 alone, nearly 2 million workers voluntarily left their jobs.

The number of people leaving their jobs over the next 12 months may be the highest rate we've seen in the last two to three years, said Bob Kelleher, former chief human resources officer for AECOM and author of *Louder Than Words: 10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps That Drive Results*. After anemic growth in 2010, signs point to a warm-up in the job market.

“Although the new grads are struggling to find work and it seems that the internship is the new entry-level job for these kids, the projections on all the college campuses are [that in] 2011 they're going to see a minimum of 10 percent increase in job offers,” he said.

With the job market warming up, organizations can expect significant turnover of high-potential talent as more than two years of pent-up demand is released. Many workers who chose to stay in their jobs during the recession are suffering from a “prisoner” mindset and looking for the first opportunity to escape, said Howard Guttman, principal of Guttman Development Strategies and author of *Coach Yourself to Win*.

“How do you engage folks who fundamentally don't feel like their prospects are good right now is a tricky game,” he said. “You have a lot of people who literally quit and stay.”

Self-coaching, a variation on traditional executive coaching, offers a relatively inexpensive potential solution to re-engage high-potential talent. “Giving this often neglected talent pool access to a sound coaching process that they could follow on their own with some assistance from colleagues can literally make the difference between an unmotivated underachiever who disengages and an enthusiastic player who could really get to the next level,” Guttman said.

Guttman said there are seven steps in the self-coaching process:

1. Determining an employee's coachability.
2. Selecting and committing to an intention.
3. Identifying a person to act as a guide, along with a network of supporters.
4. Soliciting feedback from that group.
5. Analyzing and responding to that feedback.
6. Developing and acting on a game plan.
7. Tracking success and recalibrating.

Starting a self-coaching program can be a fairly simple process. CLOs can hold a morning-long seminar with targeted employees to get them to consider their coachability and their intention and to identify mentors and sponsors. Participants could then get together periodically, every month or two months, to assess progress.

“What you're doing is you're making people accountable for their own development, which is what ideally they should be doing anyway, but now you're really taking it to a really pragmatic level versus theoretical,” he said.

Self-coaching provides important development opportunities to targeted high-potential talent and also sends the message that participants are valued. Disengaged employees often feel they are being asked to achieve goals they can't deliver and when they push back, they're often told to tough it out, which leads to sense of decreased influence.

“When they start feeling that, they feel that the company is not valuing them, then at a certain point they feel like they're not in sync with their values and then they go away,” Guttman said.

The key challenge for CLOs looking to implement a self-coaching program is determining participants' coachability. It can only work if participants are willing to drop their defenses, shift behavior and be accountable for their career development.

“In order for self-coaching to work, you cannot be a victim,” Guttman said. “You must be willing to say — and really mean — that I'm responsible for my outcomes. You also have to go beyond that to drop your defenses and be able to take feedback and look at it as a positive.”

Many employees wait for the company to give them a career road map. With self-coaching, CLOs have an opportunity to flip that expectation, combat disengagement and build trust.

“In today's world, the fact is that people need to be accountable to float their own boat,” he said. “What this is really doing is empowering people to do that.”

Only 22 percent of employees are currently engaged, said Kelleher, citing a study from the Corporate Leadership Council. Those companies that invest in employees today will be in a better position tomorrow.

“I envision there will be many people looking to leave big [companies] and return to something more entrepreneurial, more caring — firms that have a greater employee touch,” he said.

Self-coaching may be just the tool needed to provide that touch and boost retention.

Mike Prokopeak is editorial director for Chief Learning Officer magazine. He can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.