

GUIDE



EMPLOYER BRANDING:

STEP BY STEP



CONTENT



01

Introduction and Definition

What are the advantages, how does it work, how do you develop your employer brand. An overview.

P. 03



02

Employer Value Proposition

Define your EVP. What does it have to include and why.

P. 05



03

Integration into the Marketing Mix

Goals, target groups, messages – how to establish your position in the market.

P. 12



04

Candidate Experience

Your applicants should feel comfortable so they speak highly of you. What you can do about it.

P. 16



05

Employee Retention

Top performers are critical in helping you get ahead. How do you retain them? With worthwhile investments.

P. 21



06

Conclusion

Is employer branding really worth it? What you can take with you from this e-book.

P. 28

01

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION

Companies not only have to brand themselves for customers these days, but also for potential employees. Employer branding helps with positioning and influences other HR challenges – from recruiting to employee retention. This e-book provides you with tips for strategic employer branding and suggests specific initiatives.

A positive employer image is essential in the **“war for talent”** – the competition for talented employees. Companies that set themselves apart from their competitors have a better chance of attracting and retaining skilled personnel.



“Employer branding is the effective, identity-based development and positioning of a company as a trustworthy and attractive employer in both its internal and external relationships (...).”

German Employer Branding Academy

Employer branding generates a higher ROI in recruitment marketing

With employer branding, your recruiting is targeted and sustainable, which reduces costs and increases quality. Assume that two companies publish the same job advertisement on the same portal.

The company with the stronger employer brand will receive more applications for the same amount spent – it will have to invest less money in its recruiting funnel to fill a position.

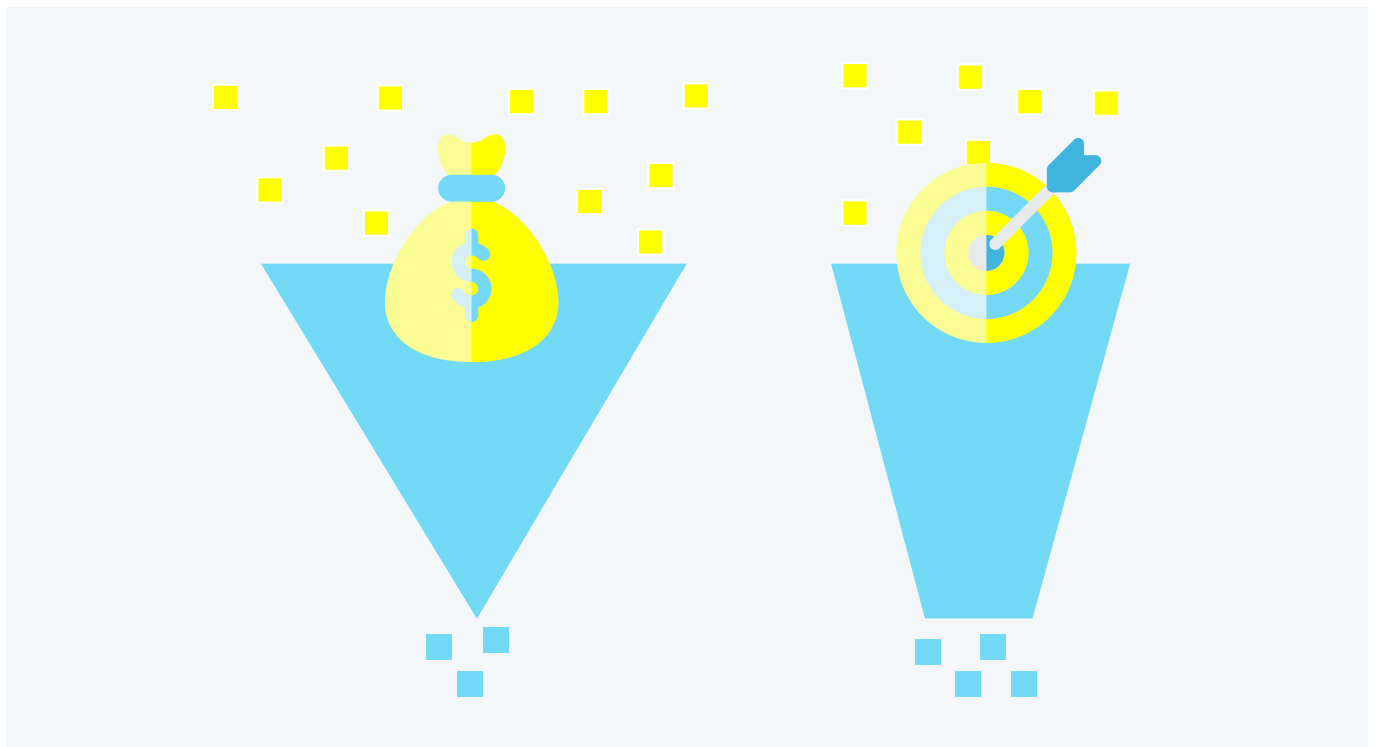


Fig. Recruitment Marketing Funnel

Left: weak employer brand

Right: strong employer brand

02

DEFINE EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITIONS

Before a company develops and communicates its employer branding strategy, it should first clearly define its Employer Value Proposition (EVP). Why exactly should applicants be interested in your company?

What differentiates you from your competitors? As an employer, what can you expect of your employees? The answers to these questions form the basis for the wording of the EVP and the creation of an employer brand.



An Employer Value Proposition is the company's promise of value that covers the employee's entire work environment. That includes everything from workspace design, compensation, and career development programs, to advanced training and career opportunities.

WHY AN EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION IS IMPORTANT



Ten years ago, it was primarily the employer that found itself in a privileged situation when selecting suitable employees: Potential candidates were thoroughly screened during the application process, while the employer only revealed little about itself. When the hire was made, the employer knew a lot about the new employee, but the employee knew very little about their future job.

What a portfolio is to an applicant, the Employer Value Proposition is to a company.

In brief: An employer uses an attractive value proposition to win over talented candidates in the market.

Like a good application, an Employer Value Proposition should be both attractive and realistically formulated. Preparing it with great care is therefore absolutely critical. For that reason, a company should heed the following points

HOW DO YOU DEFINE AN EVP?

Every successful job application leads to an interview at some point, which is the first personal contact with the company. In order to win the best talent, companies can advertise themselves with attractive value propositions. A well-crafted EVP can help you do that. It sharpens the identity of the employer and strengthens its brand. Developing one requires time, however, and a targeted approach.



Who should be involved in creating the Employer Value Proposition?

“Involve everyone that you can’t leave out without being worse off for it”, recommends the industry portal Employerbranding on the question of which groups of people in the company should be involved in creating the EVP.

In practice, that means: The project group that drives the creation of the employer brand is in the centre, and if need be, whoever is responsible for HR marketing later. At the kick-off meeting at the very latest, the works council, the management level, and executive management should be involved in creating a basic framework designed for the long term. The EVP is tied to the strategy and culture of the company, and for that reason, employees, HR managers, as well as management must contribute to it.

Definition of EVP target groups

The effectiveness of an EVP is always directly related to a specific target group. Who do you want to address? This question comes first. We recommend that you develop a higher level, generic EVP, and tailor it to specific groups of employees later on, depending on the positions and departments the new employees are to be recruited for.

Candidates for a job at the main office will most likely respond to a different EVP than prospective employees who apply at a branch in the country.

FACTORS OF THE EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION



No two EVPs are the same, and the challenge of creating one is working out your strengths as an employer in a credible way. In addition, a company should ask itself the question: What arguments do we have that could really convince a potential applicant to apply for a job with us?

*These arguments can vary substantially, but here are the **most important aspects**:*



The starting point of the EVP: compensation

Compensation is a starting point, which will serve as guidance for the remaining value proposition. It can be set below the market average, oriented to the market, or above it, and depending on its level, arguments outside compensation will be more or less important. A high salary cannot compensate for an awful work environment long term.

A company that compensates its employees at or below average needs other unique features to make itself attractive to both established professionals and young talents.



Work environment

One of the most important factors apart from compensation is the work environment. That might include promises like high-quality equipment and furniture, the setup of the office space, beverages and snacks for employees, or even the option to work from home (home office). To someone in a young target group that places a high value on a healthy work-life balance and flexibility, these are important factors.



Corporate culture

A corporate culture that applicants can identify with also plays an important role. That means all of the values a company stands for. Corporate culture can reflect a stance toward human, social or also political issues. To many applicants who are looking for long-term employment, it is important that their employer shares a similar attitude, at least on fundamental issues. At the end of the day, most employees want to be able to go to work with a good conscience.



Career opportunities

How good are the career options and advancement opportunities in the company? The answer to this question can also give your company an advantage. Does the company nurture its employees and their talents? Does it offer free professional training and development? Is it possible to move into a leadership role within a reasonable period of time? Are there positive examples of home-grown talent that have enjoyed long and productive careers? Companies whose HR marketing and Employer Value Proposition show new employees a clear perspective will score points on the job market with high-potential candidates.



Job security

How can an established company compete with young, agile startups? By emphasizing stability and job security, for example. A long history, continuous growth or a leading role in the market give an employee security. The feeling that a job is not at risk from external economic factors can be a crucial criterion for a security-oriented candidate.



Keeping an eye on the competition

Under no circumstances should companies copy from a rival company in putting together their EVP. Doing so prevents you from creating something unique and does not ensure that you address your own target group in the best way. Nevertheless, it is advisable to keep an eye on the value propositions and recruitment marketing activities of direct competitors in order to be able to respond if necessary. If a competitor cannot impress applicants with a good cafeteria, for example, you should place particular emphasis on this value proposition if your company can. Because specific EVP factors such as compensation or specific advancement opportunities are not always openly communicated, you can also employ “undercover” methods and, for example, attend career fairs incognito and search for information on competitors – a common practice in many companies.



Determining the strengths of your own company

The simplest way to find out your own company's strengths, from an employee perspective, is to simply ask employees directly. Use questionnaires or qualitative interviews, for example, to gain important insights. Your questions should focus on why an employee decided on the company, why they still like to work there, and why they would recommend their employer to a friend.

TIPS FOR FORMULATING THE EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION



Once you have defined the target groups, analysed your own strengths from an internal and external perspective, and included your competitors' weaknesses, a final EVP needs to be formulated. Companies should orient themselves around certain basic rules.

The more individually the EVP is formulated, the more credible and strongly formulated it is.

Companies should therefore absolutely refrain from generic expressions like "good career opportunities" or "wide-ranging tasks". Applicants have heard and read these things over and over, and they sound meaningless and uninspiring. Employers should therefore proceed carefully

and avoid generic arguments. Stringing together self-praise ad nauseam comes across as less believable than a detailed description using just a few arguments that really connect.

In the end, what counts with the EVP is honesty and a realistic view of your company. Employees who are disappointed by broken promises can act as negative multipliers and do a lot of damage to the employer brand. A well-conceived EVP supports employee recruiting, retention and motivation.





WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES? WHAT ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES' AND CANDIDATES' VALUES?

The more overlap there is, the better. Use research and target group interviews to collect information and create candidate personas. We have provided a template below.

[Download the "candidate persona" template](#)



Once the EVPs have been defined, the first step is to make them accessible to employees and potential applicants – via internal communication channels, and externally, in the career section of your website. The promises that you communicate both internally and externally should be realistic and consistent. What you write in the 'about us' section of your website should be consistent with what one would find in your job advertisements.



Scrutinize over and over

Clear and credible positioning on the recruitment market is only successful if promises are realistically defined and regularly given a reality check.

Feedback from employee discussions, surveys, etc. should be evaluated and taken into consideration. If necessary, you should adapt your promises.

03

INTEGRATION INTO THE MARKETING MIX

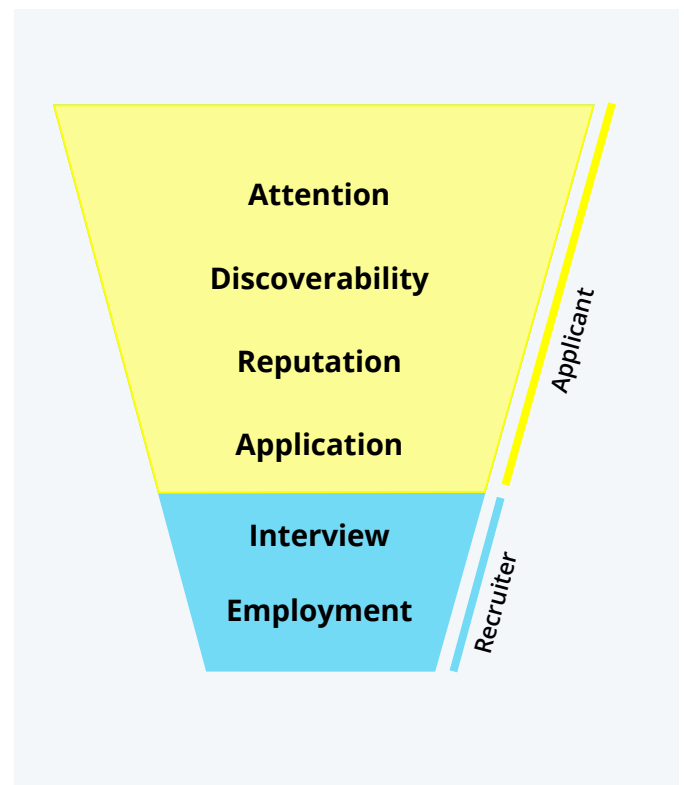


Ask yourself what channels you can select, where you would like your target group to be exposed to your brand, and how you intend to appeal to your target group.

This chart shows a recruiting funnel with possible touchpoints and channels:

Possible Channels

- Social media ads
- Display ads
- Search engines
- Video ads
- Google ads
- Job boards
- Native ads
- Content marketing
- Career fairs
- Social sharing
- Job apps
- Social media profile
- Videos
- Job advertisements
- Opportunity to apply
- Evaluations
- One-click-application



Emotionalizing the Employer's Brand

If your target group is to notice and remember your value proposition, you have to appeal to it on an emotional level. Product emotionalization is already standard in classical brand marketing, where products are charged with positive attributes through targeted imagery and language. The aim is to have both product and brand generate positive associations, and thus induce the consumer to make a purchase.

In employer branding, this emotional connection is certainly just as important, however, because the decision to choose an employer is made on an emotional level.

”

Confidence anchors are essential for a strong employer brand.



Create Confidence Anchors

Create as many points of contact as possible. This includes initiatives like event sponsoring, exhibition booths, presentations, or also internships for future applicants. At events like these, potential employees meet a company for the first time. While there, they can examine the value proposition (EVP) and see for themselves just how true it is. In the best-case scenario, they can become positive multipliers for the employer brand.

THE EMPLOYEE AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE EMPLOYER BRAND

Satisfied employees play a central role in the development of a strong and credible employer brand. They are more authentic than any advertising campaign or headhunter.

When talented interns encounter frustrated employees, that has a dramatic impact on the employer image. A motivated employee has a reassuring effect on an intern. The fact is that companies do not always get to choose which employees function as brand ambassadors and which do not.

Everybody talks about how things are at the office. Dissatisfaction at work therefore automatically transforms employees into

negative brand ambassadors who damage the organization's reputation, and this is something every HR department needs to be aware of.

In selecting new employees, a company needs to consider whether an applicant would be happy there long term. After all, even the most talented professionals can harm the employer's brand if expectations and actual working conditions clash.

Investments in a good work atmosphere have an impact not only in the form of greater motivation and stronger employee retention, but also contribute to the employer's brand over the long term.



EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIALS

Companies have a choice in specifically selecting testimonials from among their pool of employees, however. Employees who identify particularly strongly with the company are often happy to be its public face in the form of an employee statement.

Testimonials can take a range of forms, from simple surveys to spectacular and entertaining image films in which employees play the main role.



While staged testimonials certainly do not have quite the same degree of credibility as private meetings with employees, the placement of such testimonials is an effective way to enhance the employer's image.

Even the selection of employees for trade fair stands and public events has a testimonial character and should therefore be thought through carefully.

Choosing and encouraging employees for testimonials is one of many ways to promote employee retention.

04

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE: FROM THE FIRST CONTACT TO THE HIRING



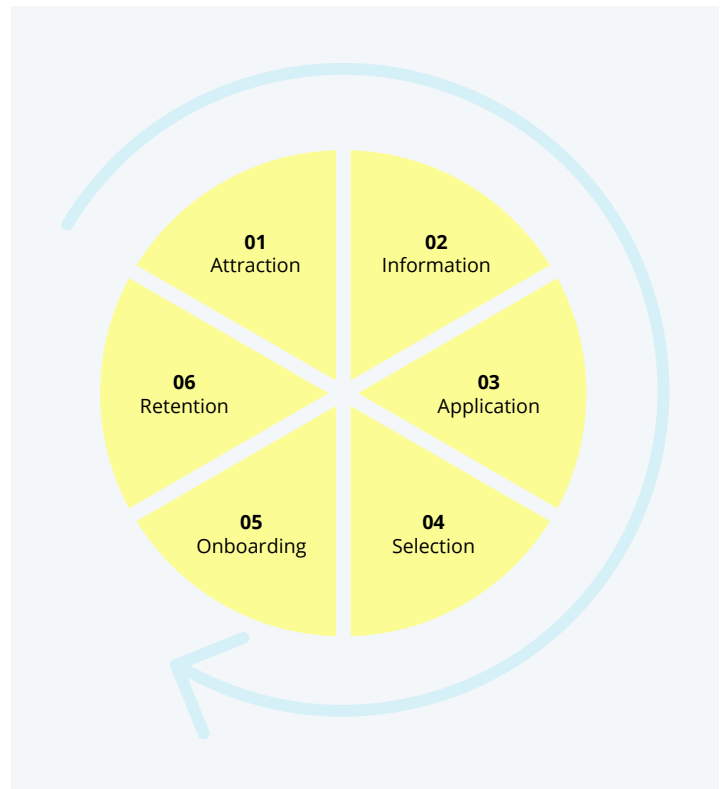
In the phase before the hire is made, the company can spruce up its image. Many job seekers consider the job search and application phases to be stressful and annoying. With the right candidate experience, organisations can distinguish themselves in a positive way, though.

The term “candidate experience” comprises all of the perceptions and experiences a candidate collects during the contact and application phases with a potential employer.

This experience phase is becoming more meaningful within the context of a unified employer branding strategy. These days, every detail counts in the competition for talent on the recruitment market, from the recruiting video to the handshake at the interview.

Today, talented young candidates choose their employer, not the other way around. The decisive impression a company makes happens long before the job actually starts. Aside from the value proposition a company gives the candidate about the hiring, there are many smaller moments an applicant goes through in their application phase that mean a lot.

THE PHASES OF THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE



01

Attraction phase

The first phase is about the initial contact between the company and the candidate. That can mean an elaborate recruiting campaign, a positive discussion at a job fair, or the recommendation of a friend. This experience should generate so much attraction that the candidate takes the time to gather some initial information about the employer, who they for the most part still do not know that much about.

02

Information phase

Normally, the second phase leads the candidate to the company website, usually to the career page. There, they should find a professionally prepared job description, which will ideally appear to match their abilities and expectations. Also, the company's overall presentation should confirm the positive impression of that first contact through its professionalism, consistency, and attractiveness.

03

Application phase

At this point, a greater investment of time will be required. To the extent that the first two phases went successfully, the candidate is now ready to write an application and complete the company's formal application requirements. Online forms should be prepared clearly, uploading documents should work without any problems, and the confirmation email should sound friendly and inviting. The candidate should feel validated that they have found the right company.

Login forms that are tedious to fill out and pages that take longer than 5 seconds to load are things that deter applicants. User-friendly digital solutions are definitely appreciated.

04

Selection phase

This phase includes scheduling a meeting, the applicant's welcome at the company, the structure of the interview process, and all follow-up communication. Here, the candidate first comes in contact with people who represent the company culture. Through their previous experiences from a distance, they have ideally developed a positive impression that will now be compared to real experiences. Under no circumstances should there be any discrepancy.

05

Onboarding phase

The welcoming culture that attracted the candidate in the first place must not abruptly end once they are hired. After all, it was an important decision criterion. A successful application should be seamlessly followed by a smooth onboarding process, which can ease the candidate's entry into the company's everyday life. If that is not done, the new hire can quickly develop the impression that the friendly contact in the application phase was only a recruiting tool, and not the way things at the company are normally.

06

Retention phase

The candidate experience only evolves into the employee experience once the new hire no longer feels like a stranger, but instead as an integral part of the company. Up to this point, there is an increased danger of losing a new employee early due to insufficient integration. Companies should therefore develop structures to examine whether the onboarding phase runs successfully with all new hires.



WHAT SCARES OFF CANDIDATES?

Not all employers realize that they need to make their application process as pleasant and affirming as possible for their applicants.

The online portal Karrierebibel did a survey that asked applicants, which aspects they found to be most stressful during the application process. The clear number one was the feedback culture following the application. A rejection that was not transparent, or receiving no answer at all annoyed respondents the most.

Complicated application portals and unpleasant questions during interviews were also extremely unpopular. Companies should take this kind of feedback seriously and review their processes accordingly.

Today, it is not enough to court only the best qualified candidates. Rejected candidates can quickly become negative multipliers. A negative candidate experience can in itself damage the employer brand – through posts in forums or word of mouth. By implication, it also means that a satisfied applicant – whether successful or not – frequently has a positive application experience to share. According to the 2013 Candidate Experience Report,

81 per cent of all applicants tell their friends about positive experiences from their application process.

WHAT ATTRACTS CANDIDATES?

A positive candidate experience is characterized particularly by **a feeling of appreciation and respect** that should come across to the candidates. This feeling can be generated in all phases of the candidate experience: a well thought out campaign with a clear statement; a well-designed career page and a straightforward application portal that quickly takes the applicant to where they want to go; no waiting on the day of the selection process; fast, individual, and meaningful feedback, independent of rejection or acceptance. In all of these aspects, the feeling resonates that the company appreciates the applicant's initiative and takes them seriously. One can absolutely go so far as to draw a comparison with customer service: In this case it is not the customer, but the applicant who is king.

How can a company set itself apart?

Showing a feeling of appreciation for the candidate is the basis for a positive candidate experience. It is certainly possible for companies to leave a lasting impression with relatively little effort, however. The 2016 Candidate Experience Report lists which moments left a particularly good impression on applicants during the application phase. These included aspects like further information on what comes next, a thank-you email after receiving the application, or the option to apply online with a social media profile. Information on the estimated duration of the application was also positively received.

Make it easy for your applicants

An application process that's actually fun? For most job seekers, that is still inconceivable. Companies should therefore take the opportunity to make the application process pleasant and easy for their candidates. This sort of commitment pays dividends on several levels. It attracts talented candidates to the company, and a relaxed candidate shows their true self much more readily and has a higher probability of recommending the company, regardless of how the application process turns out.



05

EMPLOYEE RETENTION HOW COMPANIES RETAIN TOP PERFORMERS



The better the selection, the simpler the retention

Retention management includes all of the things a company can do to foster an employee's loyalty to the company.

Employee retention does not begin on the first day of work. The foundation is laid during the selection process with the right candidate experience for a long-lasting affiliation between employee and company. HR specialists are responsible for identifying those candidates whose profiles best fit the company.

Attracting talent is a challenge for companies – retaining them is an art: What do organizations need to keep in mind in order to prevent employee turnover? For companies, a shortage of skilled employees means having to invest time and money in retaining their top performers to prevent them from switching to a more attractive employer, or even nipping the thought in the bud. These kinds of strategies and initiatives are summarized under the term “retention management”.

An applicant who seems highly talented but does not bring a set of realistic expectations will be difficult to keep. Once a decision is made that a candidate has the right skills to help the company, one therefore has to ask whether the candidate will be able to find personal fulfilment and satisfaction within it.

One way to answer this question is to check the alignment of the candidate's expectations with the Employer Value Proposition.



SATISFACTION: THE BASIS OF ALL LOYALTY

As sociologists Timothy Butler and James Wal-drop have discovered: There are three primary factors that will determine employee satisfaction on the job: skills, moral values, and interests.

In order to feel satisfied, an employee needs to bring the right competences and skills for their job. A feeling of incompetence triggers defence mechanisms or tendencies to withdraw. The company's moral values and its rewards system have to align with the values of the employee and be recognized by the employee as fair. Financial incentives, the creation of a good atmosphere, or recognition and career are three entirely different reward models – and here,

there is high potential for conflict. In addition, daily tasks should closely overlap personal interests if possible, since these are firmly linked to the personality and determine the natural 'fun factor' of the work. Surveys have shown that the salary component ranks surprisingly low when people change employers. Soft factors, which can be summarized under the umbrella term "satisfaction", are growing in significance. If the factors specified above are fulfilled, there is a solid basis for a relationship that can then be built on through targeted initiatives.

INITIATIVES FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION



Any employer goodwill can be fundamentally viewed as an employee retention tool. That begins with flexible work models such as home office, part-time work, or the option to take a sabbatical.

Meanwhile, many companies now offer basic food and drinks in the office, like water, fruit, and coffee. Employers can also endear themselves to employees by providing a large selection of quality products (particularly coffee).



Additional benefits include offerings such as team events, company sports, subsidized gym memberships, subsidized travel costs, and other small financial incentives. The more perks are individually tailored to employees, the more strongly a feeling of appreciation develops. The best and most well-known example of a broad palette of retention tools is Google. This internet giant offers its employees working conditions that resemble a theme park – and anyone who leaves the company has to first consider giving up that wonderful work environment and its perks, making this decision all the more difficult.

COSTS NOTHING, DELIVERS A LOT: FEEDBACK

A lively feedback culture is an often underestimated employee retention tool: If a top performer has already decided on leaving, unbeknownst to anyone else, it is usually too late for the company to convince them otherwise.



Those who regularly ask employees for their opinion can address growing problems early on and show an appreciation for staff well-being, which has a positive effect on retention. Exit interviews can be valuable – they provide information about grievances in the company, as well as the recruitment strategies of rival companies.

SELECTIVE EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Employee retention initiatives cost money. A broad range of basic activities that show appreciation generally makes sense, but companies should also think about which employees are really worth investing more in. From an economic perspective, long-time top performers, young talent or managers are “more valuable” than moderately qualified, undermotivated

employees. Some companies go so far as to label some of their staff “bottleneck employees”, who occupy positions and have employee profiles that there could be a shortage of in the future. Suitable junior employees are subsequently supported with customized programs designed to retain them on a long-term basis.

SUPPORT WITH LONG-PERSPECTIVE

The example shows that companies that want to retain specific employees need to ask a range of questions. For example: Which employees contribute the most to the success of the company? Which employees will play an important role in the future? What areas of the company are experiencing bottlenecks? Merely retaining those who are part of the current set of high performers is short-sighted. Employee retention means strategic enterprise development, and therefore requires far-sightedness.



EMPLOYEE RETENTION PROMOTES MOTIVATION

Equating employee retention with merely preventing people from leaving overlooks an important component of the concept. Employees who feel bound to their company in a positive sense almost always show more willingness to perform than those who are open to making a change. Employee retention should therefore be regarded as the basis of employee motivation. It not only prevents staff turnover, but also promotes growth and success, which would not be possible without these tools.





EMPLOYEE RETENTION: GOOD FOR THE EMPLOYER BRAND

Investments in employee retention pay off on different levels. They keep and motivate valuable employees and at the same time contribute to the employer brand. Retention management is thus an essential component of the employer branding strategy. Satisfied employees who feel like an important part of the company and are rooted in the company's network are much more likely to be positive multipliers and automatically recruit qualified new employees from their own networks. They therefore become valuable long-term resources and at the same time, an effective public testimonial for the company.

Employee retention questions

- Does the candidate have the necessary skills?
- Are they properly incentivized?
- Is the candidate a long-term fit?
- Am I focusing on the right candidates?

EMPLOYER BRANDING – IS IT WORTH IT?

Every one of the initiatives mentioned demands an investment of time and money: a significant presence – online or off; a targeted selection process with respectful interaction; a thoroughly developed value proposition, which ensures transparency in the company; and incentives and advancement programs for the retention of top performers. The bottom line is, you can summarize all of these activities in one word: appreciation.

The more clearly a company relates a person's knowledge and skills to its economic success, the more strongly that person will feel appreciated. Only an employee who feels respected, supported, and appreciated from day one will give their employer 100% and positively promote the image of the company to the outside – over the long haul. Organizations that put investments in things before investments in their employees are too short-sighted and look for savings in the wrong places. Good employees are the most valuable capital a company can have.



PERSONIO



Talented people expect a smooth application process and a job where they can develop and realize their potential under the right conditions.

Two of the central components of employer branding are a positive candidate experience, and a pleasant onboarding process. Both are processes that can be supported with the right software.

Create your own personal Personio trial account now and get acquainted with functions like automatic acknowledgements of receipts, straightforward application forms and supported scheduling.

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