

# Catching the keepers

How to hook the most talented workers for your company — and keep them **By Jan Ferri-Reed**

**P**ittsburgh area companies face a big problem: how to attract and keep top-flight talent from a small pool of available candidates.

That's because companies throughout the United States offer highly attractive employment situations with lures of high salaries and a host of traditional and nontraditional benefits.

In particular, recruiting and retaining nontraditional employees — from Generation Xers to senior people who want more from their careers — prompts companies to define new, flexible ways to stand out as employers of choice. Here are some guidelines to help your company get and keep the talent you need.

■ **Decide whom you want to retain.** Because people do different jobs, you may not want to retain everyone, nor retain everyone in the same way. Decide how positions contribute to your business and design a retention strategy around this assessment.

■ **Address multicultural/generational diversity.** If you have an employee population composed of Generation Xers and more senior people, give serious consideration to the differences in their approach to the workplace situation. People at more senior levels of management may have been accustomed to a more gradual process for moving their careers forward. Generation Xers, however, likely will be impatient and want to move ahead faster.

Employees have been through downsizing, rightsizing and re-engineering. They now tend to plot their careers more entrepreneurially, based on what's best for them. This may or may not include what's best for your company.

■ **Develop a tailored mentoring program.** People in today's work force, particularly Generation Xers, generally work best in a fast-paced, hands-on environment where they can be involved with the process. They may be impatient with waiting to gain the experience they need. Positions for them need to involve mentors whom they can shadow and from whom they can learn.



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■ **Pay attention to potential.** This is particularly true when working with Generation Xers. They may be light on experience, but they do want to be valued for their potential.

■ **Stay attuned to employees' needs for life balance.** Employees today are sensitive to keeping work life, home life and community life in balance. They see job and career in this focus.

■ **Seriously consider flexible work schedules.** This could include flex-time with longer work days and shorter work weeks, and telecommuting to allow employees to work from home at least part of the time.

■ **Get creative about your benefit plan.** Employees may have more sophisticated needs in this area than you thought possible. And innovation and creativity in styling cafeteria plans may be more important than in the past. For example, some companies now offer shopping services, adoption reimbursements and even pet care and pet insurance for employees.

As business climates change, you can be sure that flexibly relating to your employees will grow to become one of your most important recruiting and retention tools.



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■ **Help managers coach and facilitate more.** Power-based, autocratic management does not work as it did in the past. Better now to balance a managerial approach by taking into account employees' understanding of what their jobs or positions entail and what their potential may be, and move from there.

■ **Get wired.** And if you're wired, upgrade with consistency. Nontraditional employees want to know they work in a business with sophisticated communications capabilities. You won't keep them long if your company isn't wired properly.

■ **Balance high-tech with high-touch.** Younger people in today's work force grew up on MTV, computers and the Internet. They come to work with a high level of technological literacy.