



The 6 keys to attracting and retaining top talent


“If you want to grow your organization ... you have to have the very best people.”

John Spence has been helping organizations in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds grow their organizations for decades by serving as a business coach and writing his own books that give the step-by-step guides. But all of it means nothing without the ability to nurture your organizational culture, and you need top talent to make all those puzzle pieces work.

As Spence said during our SURGE Growth keynote conversation, “culture is one of the main things that keeps and attracts top talent. If you want to grow your organization ... you have to have the very best people.”

So, what do the very best people actually look for in an organization? According to Spence, it's six things:

- 1. Fair pay.** This does not mean you have to pay exorbitant sums to keep people around. But you do have to make sure it's not a major consideration when a potential or current staff-member is making a choice between two organizations. What does fair pay look like? Within about 10 percent of the market rate for that position. If you can't pay someone what they deserve, then you shouldn't be surprised when they end up leaving your organization to be treated fairly somewhere else.
- 2. Challenging and meaningful work.** This is a key that associations should be able to showcase. Top talent will stick around even when things get rough because they know they're working toward a great cause. If your organization is helping people or solving problems, then make sure that's front-and-center not only on a daily basis inside your organization, but outside it, too, when you're looking to hire new people. If a potential staff-member doesn't have values that align with the work you're doing, then it wouldn't be a great culture fit anyway.
- 3. Cool colleagues.** Great people want to work with other great people. By nurturing an organizational culture that lets individuality shine and folks find their best friends at work, then you make it incredibly difficult for a staff-member to want to leave. Now, this doesn't mean that you prioritize fun over work. But it does mean that you give them some room to socialize, find commonalities and work as a team.

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4. **A winning culture.** Make sure your Core Purpose and Core Values are front-and-center during the hiring process, and you'll already begin to weed out people who don't fall into alignment with the things your organization considers most important. And once you do so, remember that your culture is a living, breathing part of your association and requires constant attention. You've got to hire and fire to your culture. Otherwise, it's like you don't have one in the first place.
5. **Opportunities for personal and professional growth.** Can your staff members look at their experiences at your organization and know that they are becoming smarter? Happier? Staffers should be able to look around and know the organization is willing and able to invest in their professional development, whether with internal training and coach, or by sending them to external events and conferences to help level-up their skillset. It's also important that staffers see growth abilities at the organization with pathways to existing positions or the ability to carve out a new space for themselves through honest conversations with their leaders.
6. **A leader that can be trusted, respected and admired:** This is the single most important reason a talented staffer will stay with a company. If they feel like they are being led by someone who truly and honestly comes to work to make a difference everyday, who can be trusted to have respectful conversations, even on tough subjects, and who gains that kind of respect from the people they work with, then a talented staffer is usually willing to put up with issues in other areas — but not with a poor leader.

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