



Karen Orr – HR Director at Chesterton Global



Property company, Chesterton Global, was established over 200 years ago. It is currently going through a period of enormous change since going into receivership in 2005. This has created interesting challenges for HR Director, Karen Orr, not least of all, as far as retention is concerned.

Originally there were three divisions but now there is only one – Residential. Karen has been concentrating on getting the HR side of things back up and running and putting strategy in place.

Karen is responsible for recruitment and the company has been putting talent management and retention strategies in place.

She agrees that attrition has a critical impact on an organisation:

“Attrition is clearly detrimental to an organisation’s effectiveness primarily due to the cost of recruitment and training, she comments. “It has an impact on customer service and ultimately will slow down our growth and progress whether that is from a financial or market share perspective. It undermines our ability to become what we want to be: from an HR perspective that is being an employer of choice. From the business point of view it could be driving revenue or growing the number of units we have.”

However, she believes that good recruitment is the start point of any retention process.

“If you can make the funds available, it’s a good idea to invest in understanding retention issues: it can help you to appreciate what your employees want.”

Getting the basics right

“If you don’t get recruitment right you will have a problem with retention,” she says. “It’s a critical and more obvious part of the chain as, when you don’t have the right people in place, it’s very apparent.

“However, if you can make the funds available, it’s a good idea to invest in understanding retention issues: it can

help you to appreciate what your employees want. It’s easy for an organisation to assume it knows what its employees are looking for and, on occasion, put the wrong measures in place.”

Karen is working hard to develop a more rigorous recruiting process, so does she think that smarter recruiting can slow down attrition rates?



Karen Orr – HR Director at Chesterton Global



“Sometimes managers are desperate just to get someone, anyone, in place instead of concentrating on getting the right person.” she responds. “It is disappointing to lose people at any time but particularly during the probation period so we work with our managers to ensure that we do get the right people first off.”

“A skilful manager is an essential element in both recruiting and retention. You can have the right processes in place but if you don’t have the right attitude or understanding, you are never going to resolve the issue.”

Chesterton Global is in the process of putting a variety of measures in place to train managers in recruitment skills. They have developed competency models and introduced psychometric testing. The work is on-going and will include training on how to develop staff.

“We need to concentrate on developing meaningful career progression and development opportunities,” she says.

“Top performers need to be managed differently. We need our managers to understand this and supply them with the right tools.”

Changing management perceptions

Karen believes that, certainly in the property sector, one of the main challenges to retaining staff is often management perception.

“There is a view as to what type of person fits a particular type of role,” she explains. “This perception needs to change. Many managers are team focussed and don’t always think about the actual output of the team. Very often teams are young and they think bringing a mature person into this environment will be wrong for the team. However, it could be a good thing for the organisation.”

She admits that getting managers to realise they need to manage differently is her focus at the moment.

“Top performers need to be managed differently. We need our managers to understand this and supply them with the right tools,” she says. “We also need to get serious about succession planning which is high on the list of priorities at the moment.”

Understanding what employees want

Part of Chesterton Global’s HR reconstruction involves putting a clearly defined retention strategy in place. Karen used TalentDrain’s staff satisfaction tool, Talent Pulse, to start the process of understanding employee expectations and needs.



Karen Orr – HR Director at Chesterton Global



“Through the staff satisfaction survey we identified that rewards and benefits are at the top of list for our top performers.

“It is a really useful survey. To an extent it just confirmed some of things we had in mind. But it was great to be able to present it back to employees and for them to be reassured by the anonymity. They found the feedback really interesting not to mention amusing in parts.”

In addition to the staff survey, Chesterton Global has introduced Last Opinion, TalentDrain's online exit questionnaire. This is a fairly recent introduction and the data hasn't yet been analysed. The intention is to compare it with the results from ongoing satisfaction surveys.

“I'd like to be able to pull out different groupings, for instance, high performers or managers,” says Karen. “It will be helpful in reassuring us that the staff survey findings are correct. Perhaps we will see some differences in the reasons people give for leaving.”

“Focusing on retention is not something you can do and think that's it for the next three years. It's something you need to keep revisiting.”

Retention is a constantly moving force

One of the problems with retention is that it doesn't stand still. As soon as one issue is addressed, another occurs. Juggling issues to prevent a knock-on effect is something that Karen is more than aware of.

“We know the areas where we are struggling or doing really well and so understand what needs to be addressed,” she says. “We also know the areas that might become a problem if we're not careful. However, we can't work on everything at once. If we address things that are not good at the moment, then, unless we are really careful, it could adversely impact another area.

“In a sense, we've always got to keep reinventing what we are doing – which is one of difficulties with retention. Focusing on retention is not something you can do and think that's it for the next three years. It's something you need to keep revisiting. It needs to be looked at on an annual basis if not more frequently. Then it's about how you follow through.”

For more information, please call TalentDrain on +61 (02) 8001 6265 or e-mail info@talentdrain.com.au www.talentdrain.com.au