

Finding Staff, Keeping Staff

Description

For several years, we have discussed the “silver tsunami” of the title industry. Right now, we are experiencing a boom and having a hard time finding experienced people. Part of the reason for the shortage and the tsunami is that this industry is cyclical and when the last dip occurred, many experienced title people left us and we were able to manage with those that survived.

Now we have many thinking of retiring in the next few years (will those plans get moved up given the levels of stress and work we’ve experienced?), and a shortage of experienced staff. So how do you keep staff?

As an agency representative, I have seen many different styles of management and some patterns. And let me preface this by saying that I’ve taught dog obedience and rescued dogs for years and, well, behavior is behavior across species. If you want to teach a sentient being something and keep them working toward your goals, you need to build trust and reward them for doing their jobs well.

Lots of people train their dogs by keeping them on a leash and jerking them around, yelling at them, but that doesn’t build trust and doesn’t make them want to keep coming back to work harder. That’s the basic lesson, but how do you apply this to staffing?

Well, first, communicate with your staff. Take time on a regular basis (I would suggest weekly) to sit down with them, go over the trends and problems you’re seeing, and ask them to do the same. And *listen*. Many solutions and misunderstandings will bubble up just from that communication. Other employees can put their thinking caps on and come up with solutions or see where problems in the workflow lie.

Know your staff. Get to know them personally and check in with them. Are they happy with the current position and want to stay there indefinitely, doing a great job? Or do they aspire to learn more? Are there things that you can do to help them work smarter, more efficiently?

Reward them. What would be rewarding for your staff? Many of us do a group lunch now and then but that may be too rushed and seem too easy. Perhaps paying for educational courses would provide education as well as certifications that will be helpful to you in running the agency. Some people like to be recognized, while others prefer time off or money. Would providing a bonus or pay raise when they successfully complete a course help motivate employees to improve their knowledge and skills and also help the business in the process?

If you find yourself continually losing staff, you need to look at your culture, and/or your hiring practices. If you get upset when mistakes are made, do you go back and apologize and ask what you as a manager can do to prevent reoccurrences? As one longtime manager who has built an amazing, long-lasting team told me “Never ask an employee to do something that you would not do.”

We are all continually learning in this business – mistakes happen. Do we use them as teaching

experiences or do we blow up and then move on and expect employees to forget but still trust us? â??Meet their needs first, help them feel safe, and build your bond with them. Work will become so much easier.â?• (Thatâ??s a dog training mantra. Also applicable in human behavior.) Itâ??s the end of another year! A busy year for those of us in the title insurance industry â?? letâ??s reflect and think about how we can make the new year a better one!

**Colleen Taylor**

Colleen has been in the title industry since 1990, when she was hired as a construction risk analyst in the Norfolk office of Lawyers Title Insurance. Prior to that, she had been a mortgage loan officer in her home state of Indiana. In addition to working in various capacities with Lawyers Title, she also ran an agency for a large home builder. She now serves as an Agency Representative for Old Republic National Title and enjoys helping agents with the myriad of issues they face.

Colleen lives in Warrenton with her rescued dog and cat and enjoys yardwork, hiking, and kayaking in her free time. She is a graduate of Purdue University.

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