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A Conversation with the Oliver Group: How Culture and Career Pathing Boost Employee Retention

Slayton Search Partners



Seismic shifts have occurred in the employment market over the last 18 months. As a result, retention has quickly become the hot topic, particularly as employees across industries are quitting at record rates and the number of job openings remains equally high. Against the landscape of a highly competitive labor market and shifting employee expectations, leaders are reassessing their retention strategies in an effort to stay ahead of the game.

We spoke recently with the Oliver Group about the results of the [Slayton workplace trends survey](#), and the topic of retention was clearly top of mind. Below we explore the Oliver Group's insight about company culture and career pathing and how these two concepts dovetail to support employee retention.

A People-First Culture Inspires Employee Loyalty

When processes trump people and the bottom line is the top priority, company culture becomes transactional. Employees in this environment will quickly adopt this transactional mindset towards their career with that company, resigning the moment the equation no longer tips in their favor. If a company can fire someone today and hire a new person tomorrow without impacting productivity, the Oliver Group warns that this is major cause for concern. That business may be a well-oiled machine, but it's likely unadaptable and impersonal, failing to account for the human element of their workforce—and ultimately unable to innovate, scale, and adapt when employees start leaving at record rates.

At the core of a people-first culture, however, is the deep-rooted belief that people are irreplaceable, not dispensable. Companies like this refuse to treat employees like their next M&A contract. Beyond the contracted expectations, rules, and responsibilities, there's a sincere effort to support each employee as an individual. Life happens, and when leaders respect that with tangible benefits and best practices, their employees are more likely to stay for the long term. The [Slayton workplace trends survey](#) supports this—the most valued benefits among employees are remote flexibility, mental health benefits, bonuses, and paid time off.

Additionally, the Oliver Group points out that in a people-first culture, leaders will recognize that each employee brings unique characteristics to the table. For example, it's not realistic to assume (consciously or not) that all employees share the same drive and dominant traits often associated with business owners. However, it appears to be a common challenge that the few professionals who *do* possess those characteristics (often business leaders themselves) tend to anticipate the same work ethic from their colleagues and direct reports.

However, most employees are somewhere in the middle; they desire to succeed in their jobs but need support and direction to advance in their professional development. When leaders nurture a company culture that values the unique personality make-up of their workforce, it will have a long-term positive impact on retention.

Career Pathing Boosts Employee Retention

In addition to a supportive company culture, the Oliver Group emphasizes the importance of providing engaging and future-focused career options to improve retention. Furthermore, investing in the career development of new leaders is a staple of a successful business, as it ensures a solid succession plan and continued stability in the company's leadership. To this end, many businesses are realizing the need to double down on a long-term strategy.

Regardless of what an employee's career path looks like, there are a few key tactics to ensure they feel supported and valued every step of the way. Taking the time to recognize who is ready for a promotion, a horizontal move into a different role, or leadership development is often the first step. Recognition goes a long way toward inspiring trust as well as opening doors for employees to grow in new and unexpected ways.

Secondly, the Oliver Group has seen that communication, coaching, and intentional conversation are foundational to successful career pathing. Employees need to hear from their leaders—beyond simply checking-in on tasks in a transactional manner. Regular feedback and an outlet to share ideas and questions is critical. Sometimes it's as simple as asking questions about an employee's challenges, motivation, and goals to help facilitate their growth.

Finally, it's important to remember that to be a leader is to embrace the singular focus of helping develop people. It's a common scenario that when sales professionals get promoted to a leadership position, they often continue working in the same fashion as they were before. However, their main goal is no longer to drive sales but to coach *other* people to succeed in sales. *This* is the culture of leadership and will have a greater impact on both retention and business success than any other strategy.

Ultimately, nurturing a strong culture and building intentional career paths are critical elements of a successful retention strategy. If leaders want to remain competitive in an increasingly high-stakes employment market, this insight from the Oliver Group is a valuable reminder of where a company's priorities must lie.

About the Oliver Group

The [Oliver Group](#) is a leadership consultancy, committed to working alongside teams and businesses to help them perform at the highest level. Partnering with companies ranging from start-ups to Fortune 100s, the Oliver Group helps their clients fuel growth, overcome obstacles, and achieve goals. Through leadership and team development and executive coaching, the Oliver Group is ready to help organizations reach their full potential.