

IT ZONE

By Alexander J. Hanna

Is Your IT Staff About To Leave You For Another Job?

Is your IT staff about to leave you for another job? If your answer is no, you had better think again. Believe it or not, they are going to leave you sooner rather than later. Now please don't all rush down to the IT department and interrogate your staff about whether this is true or not. Frankly, they will deny it.

What you should know is that IT professionals (in The Bahamas) are changing jobs as fast as my 6 year old daughter changes her clothes. Many businesses can attest to this; I personally know of around 15 IT professionals who have changed jobs, this year alone.

Why are they changing jobs?

As usual the number one reason is "no money" and the fact that other companies are luring them to work for their organizations. If you employ good IT professionals, I suggest that you start evaluating if they are happy and are being properly compensated, sooner rather than later. Qualified IT professionals are in demand, so if your professionals are qualified and IT is important to your business, then ensure that they are well compensated.

How to retain your IT Staff?

Before you can answer this question, you must examine some of the issues that are vital for retaining IT professionals.

Mo Money - Believe it or not, this is not the main driving force why an IT professional might consider leaving your employment. The reason I believe that money is the strongest motivator is that unless the staff moves to a job that includes an upward promotion, the salary difference is normally small. In many cases, an organization might feel that when they pay their IT professionals better than other businesses, the staff feels compelled to stay in their employment. Not so. Therefore, I suggest that attrition among IT professionals is not due to a single reason but is a combination of factors. These include:

Working Conditions

Working conditions are important, and poor working conditions can include lack of space, lack of spending on required hardware/software to perform their job and unreasonable job demands to name a few. Additionally, most organizations do not treat IT with respect. This stems from the idea that IT is a cost to the business and does not generate revenue. However, businesses should view IT as an asset to enhance their revenue-generating capabilities and assist in cutting costs.

Career Path

Most businesses do not have a career path for IT professionals. If you expect to attract and retain quality IT professionals, you must chalk out a clear career path for these professionals. Additionally, IT staff requires constant training which should be combined with a career path policy. For example, you might have a policy that states that when IT staff attains certain qualifications, they will be promoted or receive additional benefits.

I find it truly amazing that so many organizations do not have a career path for their IT professionals. No wonder they do not remain loyal to organizations. Do not take their loyalty for granted. Businesses believe that they can treat IT professionals as they please; this is a bad idea.

Latest Technology

“Guess what! We just installed the latest version of Microsoft Windows; all our machines come with a minimum of 1MB of memory; all our monitors have been upgraded to 17” flat screens.” These are some of the statements that IT professional make to each other. Now imagine the guy on the receiving end of such statements. IT professionals like to remain on the cutting edge of technology. So if your business is not progressing in IT, IT professionals get jittery. They want to know that they are working for an organization that is keeping up with IT.

I, for one, do not like working with technology that is no longer relevant. This does not mean that organizations should immediately acquire the latest and best technology. The idea behind new technology is that research has been done to enhance the technology in one way or the other. By its nature, IT is evolving continuously at unparalleled speeds. Therefore, if a business is not evolving, it is also reflected in its IT department. I am not suggesting that you buy new technology just for the sake of buying it. I am just stating a reason why IT professionals might consider leaving an organization.

Limited Resources

Another reason why IT professionals leave an organization is due to the limited number of qualified IT professionals in the country. Listed are several arguments why this is so:

- Lack of opportunities to gain IT knowledge
- College graduates remain abroad to work because of more opportunities
- For local International businesses; the majority of their IT work is done by their overseas IT professionals. Therefore, their local IT staff simply ‘baby sits’ their IT infrastructure.
- The Government tends to look for foreign IT providers thereby overlooking local talent. Hence there is a lack of opportunities to gain experience.

Training

The truth is that businesses are afraid to spend money on training IT professionals because they feel that the IT professionals will leave their employment as soon as they complete their training. What are the other options that organizations have? They simply cannot afford not to have trained personnel. Rather organizations should put policies in place that allow them to protect their investment by requiring IT professionals to sign contracts that if they leave within a certain period, they must reimburse the business. No one expects a business to spend 10,000 dollars on training individuals and have them leave their employment within two months. Therefore, it is important to have a written policy on such matters. Loyalty contracts should be a part of discussions when hiring a new employee along with offering them a career path. Some suggestions:

- Ensure that the business has a component IT leader (see my article in The Nassau Guardian – July 16, 07)
- Ensure that the business has an IT plan that includes career paths for your IT resources.
- Familiarize yourself with the salary scales of IT professionals for their respective job functions.
- Stop treating IT as a cost but rather as a resource that assists your business in generating revenue or cutting cost.



Personalities

Believe it or not, many IT professionals change jobs because they have personality issues with their superiors. Some possible reasons are:

- A subordinate is suppressed by their superior because the supervisor is afraid that the subordinate is impressing to many people in the organization
- The superior wants to attend all the training programs himself
- The superior is incompetent for the job at hand
- The superior performs all the work himself, thus hoarding information

Therefore, if you don't believe my argument that your IT staff is planning to leave, then ask yourself this question: How many employees have you hired away from other businesses in recent time? If you answer this question honestly, then my point has been made.

To my fellow IT professionals out there, please forgive me if your bosses start questioning you about your intentions; at the same time you must thank me for bringing some of your concerns to the forefront. Until next time (UNT).

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