



CHRISTOPHER MULLIGAN and CRAIG TAYLOR

talent keepers

How Top Leaders Engage and Retain
Their Best Performers

WILEY

The authors are highly successful pros in talent management strategies. Their new book brings valuable insight to the impact of leaders in every organization. It's a superb resource for anyone managing a team or leading an engagement initiative.

—**Beverly Kaye**

Founder, Career Systems International

Christopher and Craig have done a very thorough job of creating a guide on how to engage and to keep talent. There is nothing more important than the talent you bring into your organization, and retaining that talent. Follow *Talent Keepers* advice and you will move from good to great and great to greater.

—**Lee Cockerell**

Former Executive Vice President,
Walt Disney World® Resort and Best-Selling Author

Individual success and organizational performance—there are no more important topics in today's competitive world, and *Talent Keepers* shows how to increase both! Learn the strategies and tactics which will unleash the potential of your people to drive your organizational success. This book goes beyond data to understanding and action.

—**Richard M. Vosburgh, PhD**

Retired Senior Vice President and Chief HR Officer,
KEMET Electronics Corporation

talent
keepers

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PREFACE

America's workplace has taken us on quite a run over the past two decades. Riding the dot-com boom that fueled the "war for talent" during the 1990s, the bubble suddenly burst in 2000, slipping us into a recession. By 2003, job growth, income, and employee optimism were soaring again, this time powered by subprime mortgages and suspect lending practices that, as you know, all came crashing down, starting at the end of 2007, sending the US economy into an extended funk. For too many Americans, employment opportunities dried up, wages stagnated, businesses closed, and growth largely came to a halt.

Thankfully, the long road to recovery began in 2014 and was paved with the longest stretch of continuous job growth in our history. In 2018, the American economy continued to grow and expand resulting in record low unemployment rates. The National Total Unemployment rate was 4.1%, a full point below the 5.1% rate which the US Federal Reserve considers "full employment." The unemployment rate for those with college degrees is almost half the total unemployment rate at 2.1%. For employees, if you want to work you have choices. For employers, if you want workers you have to be able to engage them in order to get them to stay!

Studying the American workforce throughout this roller coaster of a ride, we took a deep dive, looking for those things that keep people going at work in good times and bad. What we discovered motivated us to write this book, propelled by our desire to share what we learned.

What inspires people and fuels a commitment to their employers, their roles, and their leaders? How do “best-in-class” organizations retain great people while competition is fierce in areas like technology, healthcare, engineering, and even skilled trades? Are employers adapting quickly enough to keep millennials—the largest generation in the workforce—committed and inspired in their jobs? What impact do leaders, at all levels, have in building trust and strong relationships with their team members? Do leaders really understand the impact they have on their team members’ engagement and decisions to stay or leave? This book explores these questions and many, many more, offering a series of practical strategies and tactics you can put to work within your organization and with your team.

We have the privilege of working with and learning from many of the world’s most successful organizations representing nearly every industry. Our hope is that, through this book, you, too, will learn new ways to strengthen your culture and raise the collective energy and performance of everyone with whom you work.

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We would like to thank our clients, colleagues, and families for their insights, collaboration, and support, without which this book would not be possible.

INTRODUCTION

ENERGIZING A CHANGING WORKPLACE

Picture Walt Disney World. We are standing in the Magic Kingdom, and the grand parade that takes place every day is rolling past. The parade has been exciting and entertaining, full of genuinely magical spectacles, and here at the end, heading toward us right now, is the final float, the one that excites the children more than any other. Here comes Mickey Mouse.

With this book, that's not what interests us. We could not possibly quantify the particular magic of Mickey Mouse. Many have tried that already, and we are not sure anyone has quite succeeded. Mickey is simply magic incarnate, we suppose. No, what interests us with this book is the guy coming up behind Mickey's float. We're interested not in the cast member who occupies that Mickey suit, but rather in the one who cleans up after the horse that pulls Mickey's carriage.

This is a true story. We knew a Magic Kingdom Parade cast member whose job was to follow Mickey Mouse's horse-drawn coach, which is always the last float in the procession of the daily three o'clock parade at the Magic Kingdom. This means that this one cast member was the last person anyone saw in the parade. His job? To shovel the horses' poop into a large can he pushed around on wheels.

So here's an employee who gets to parade in front of thousands of people every day as he winds his way through the Magic Kingdom,

and he's doing it all with that rancid-smelling bucket rolling along at his side. If that had been us, we might have had a hard time getting enthusiastic about the role—never mind engagement. We would have been looking for a new job pretty much from the moment that first parade ended on our first day. This particular cast member, though, always had a smile on his face. He was so committed to the magic that is Disney World and the joy that it brought to so many people that he didn't just believe, but *knew* that every scoop he shoveled into his bucket was a key part of keeping that magic alive. He wasn't shoveling horse poop; he was making magic.

With this book, we are going to be discussing engagement strategies for today and tomorrow's workplace. And as leaders of organizations, the kind of engagement we strive for in every one of our employees should be exactly the kind of engagement we saw in that Disney cast member shoveling horse manure. That level of engagement is the surest way to bring perpetually positive energy to the workplace. It energizes everyone around you. It leads to commitment and loyalty. It causes the organization to retain more of its high-level talent. It helps develop lesser performers into workers that can make a more positive and lasting impact. It improves a staff's effectiveness from top to bottom. And if it works for someone whose job is literally to shovel horse dung into a bucket, then it can and will work for any role in any organization.

Blink, and Your Staff Has Changed

Think about the dynamics of the people and teams you have worked with recently. You may have noticed an interesting, if not troubling, trend: These days, the workforce on which we depend changes rapidly. People leave their employers for new opportunities more frequently than ever before. More and more often, organizations find themselves committing the time and resources to train a new employee, only to see him underperform or even depart before ever

making a meaningful impact. Often, this leads to an underlying drain on the energy and commitment of an entire staff.

To succeed in this remarkably fluid new workplace, the best organizations must find ways to invigorate their staffs. That invigoration comes with a new focus on the importance of managers and the critical role they play in employee engagement and retention.

These trends are no accident. The rate of turnover from the retiring baby boomers to the millennial generation is almost unprecedented. Five million millennials enter the job market every year, bringing with them all the values, habits, and expectations unique to their background. The challenge that so many leaders face is how to energize a workforce whose needs seem to evolve and change from one day to the next.

Another part of the difficulty is in understanding and bridging cultural differences. Younger workers in the twenty-first century value different things than the stalwarts nearing the twilight of their careers. On top of that, you have the constantly advancing (and often disruptive) march of technological development. Myriad tasks have become automated, dramatically shifting workflows and rendering obsolete what used to be key roles. Throw in each individual employee's preferences for mode of communication, the spectrum of his or her expectations for how and when each might advance with a promotion, and the increasingly public manner in which social media allows us to lead our personal and professional lives. Add it all up, and we find that managers at every level often feel as if they are drinking from a veritable firehose of data. It can be all too difficult for them to keep up with changing demands, shifting staffs, and objectives that often feel like moving targets.

Although the pressures related to maintaining a hardworking and loyal workforce are nothing new, employers both large and small have recently begun to think about employee retention in a revolutionary new way. It all started during the so-called "war for talent" that came