

**Employee Retention**

# **Why I Encourage My Best Employees to Consider Outside Job Offers**

by Ryan Bonnici

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Stan Tekiela Author/Getty Images

**Summary.** Most bosses live in fear that their best employees will leave, so it might seem to be a bad idea to encourage your stars to consider outside offers. But in fact, it sends employees a clear signal that you really care about their learning

and development. Openness allows... [more](#)

Every day we get new reminders of just how tough the war for talent can be. It isn't enough to attract the greatest employees — you have to retain them. That's become a bigger challenge with “job hopping” on the rise. One survey found that 64% of workers, and 75% of those under the age of 34, believe frequently switching jobs will benefit their careers.

Why, then, would I actively encourage even my best employees to pursue outside job offers? The answer is simple, if counterintuitive: It helps the business succeed.

In my last job, as senior director at HubSpot, and now as CMO of G2 Crowd, I've not only encouraged my employees to look elsewhere but also told them that I keep an eye out for potential new jobs for myself as well. Ironically, all this helps me win — and quite often keep — terrific employees. Here's why.

**Employees want development, not lip service.** Today's employees, especially Millennials, “want jobs to be development opportunities,” Gallup explains. 87% of Millennials and 69% of non-Millennials rate “professional or career growth and development opportunities” as important. But many businesses are failing on this front. Less than half the Millennials surveyed by Gallup strongly agreed that they'd had opportunities to learn and grow in the previous year. And only one-third said their most recent learning opportunity was “well worth” their time.

So while almost every company promises to develop its employees, all too often that's just lip service. And it's up to managers to ensure their companies live up to the promises of professional development.

As executive coach Monique Valcour wrote in HBR, the “manager-employee dyad is the new building block of learning and development in firms.”

When I make clear to my employees that I want them to consider all options for their careers, they see that I’m genuinely committed to helping them learn and grow. They know it’s not lip service; I care about their development. If I think they’ve gotten to the top of their learning curve on my team, and I can’t figure out a way to help them grow, I will support their efforts to get a job somewhere else.

As research has found, employees often quit not because of their company but because of their manager. They stay for a manager they believe in — one who wants to help them achieve their goals. I’ve had employees tell me they chose to come work for me, and chose to stay, because of that commitment.

**Openness allows conversations to thrive.** By encouraging my employees to consider outside possibilities and sharing my stories with them, I foster a culture of openness in our communication. When they get outside offers, that communication makes a big difference.

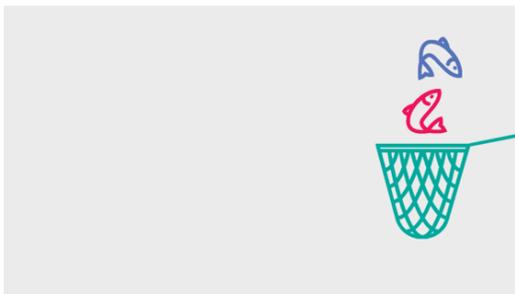
As LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman wrote in HBR, employees often feel they can’t speak honestly with their managers about their career goals “because of the reasonable belief that doing so is risky and career-limiting if the employee’s aspirations do not perfectly match up with the manager’s existing views and time horizons.” So they don’t share information about outside offers until they’ve gone “far down the road” with the potential new employer.

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Retention

By showing my team that I want to support them either way, I am creating a culture in which my



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employees feel comfortable sharing every career step with me. This open dialog gives me time and opportunity to find a way to keep them. Often, there’s something I can do — such as get them a new experience or project, add to their responsibilities, or negotiate a raise. I’ve found that most employees don’t realize how much flexibility a company has when it comes to finding a way to retain high-performing talent.

This process also makes them feel respected. As Christine Porath and Tony Schwartz found in a survey, half of employees don’t feel respected by their bosses. Those who do are more likely to stay.

**There are benefits to their leaving.** This may be the most counterintuitive point of all. But when great employees decide to leave on good terms, there can be an upside for the company. Out in the world, they’ll be in a powerful position to speak honestly about their experiences. If they leave our company feeling good about us, they’ll speak positively about the brand. If they feel good about me, they’ll encourage great people to come work for me.

This is why, once it’s become clear that there’s no way I can keep them, I offer advice to help my staff negotiate the best deal they can get at their new employer.

Every employee is unique. So it's true that not everyone is entirely replaceable. But when someone leaves, it is an opportunity for me to bring in someone else with different strengths and new things to offer the team.

**They're more likely to return.** Not every new venture works out. Some employees leave to try their hand at startups, which have a high failure rate. Others work at new companies only to find that the job isn't what they expected, or that the culture isn't the right fit. So these great employees may be looking for work again someday — and you want to be at the top of their list.

These so-called boomerang employees are on the rise, and serve as an “increasingly valuable source of talent,” HBR has noted. So a goodbye party for an employee may turn out to have been a “farewell for now.” If you can help them feel that the place they're leaving is something of a work “home,” they just might return.

Of course, there's no one-size-fits-all way to handle employee relationships. People have different styles and different comfort zones for communication. And businesses have different hiring and recruiting strategies depending on their company cultures. No matter what I do, some employees will choose to be more secretive and to keep their outside opportunities closer to the vest. That's OK. As long as I make clear that my door is open, and that while they're wanted here we won't try to trap them here, we build a culture of employee empowerment.

And no matter where they end up next, if they become hiring managers, I want them to have learned valuable lessons about giving their own employees this same freedom and encouragement. This is how we build stronger work cultures.