

Book: *Employee Retention: Solving the Healthcare Crisis*

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Competitive salaries, paid moving expenses, continuing education expenses, license reimbursement, and comprehensive benefit plan. No, this wasn't the advertisement for the CEO of a multi-hospital health care system. This was an advertisement for a physical therapist or occupational therapist in the *Dayton Daily News* in May. Other enticements in the health care section of the classified included retirement plans, \$5,000 tuition repayment, and \$5,000 sign-on bonuses, flexible schedules, and limited weekend requirements. In health care systems across the U.S., management spends early Sunday morning reviewing the classifieds. They are not looking for a job. They are assessing how competitive their latest offer is for attracting new employees.

Numerof and Abrams provide a different solution to chasing the elusive health care worker. They advocate "retaining the employees you have" versus chasing the replacements. It is important to note in the Introduction that the authors caveat that their solutions are born out of over 20 years of experience in consulting to healthcare organizations. This caveat is important for one reason. The solutions aren't backed by extensive published research. Although the problem is well framed with studies, the solutions are tried and true results-driven examples.

What do I mean by a well-framed problem? Numerof and Abrams include extensive research to describe the marketplace for health care workers. Studies sources include U.S. Congressional Research Service, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Labor. Although some of the data sources may seem dated, a quick bibliography search on the subject doesn't produce more recent studies. Interesting, most data points referenced in Chapter 2 were from a 2000 survey of the Top-100 hospitals by Numerof and Associates, Inc (a consulting firm owned by one of the authors, A.K.A - NAI) on retention and turnover.

In the NAI survey, they grouped responses about retention methods into nine categories (compensation, benefits, training and development, management access and communication, career development/internal promotion, scheduling, recognition, task forces and employee surveys, and staffing). Furthermore, the survey breaks down the most effective and least effective methods. Ironically, some methods are on both lists. The authors do a great job of explaining how application makes the difference. Interesting, some of these methods are listed in my introductory paragraph from the Dayton classifieds.

My favorite chapter of the book is Chapter 6, Cross-Industry Practices: Lessons from the Best. The authors clearly paint the issue of employee retention outside the health care box. Although we are in the midst a painful shortage (set up by the "well-framed problem"), employee retention is not a health care-unique problems. The examples from the manufacturing, technology, and service sectors identified solutions not widely practiced in the health care industry. As for health care examples, the text is confined by a reliance on examples from Miami Valley Hospital.

In the final chapter, Numerof and Abrams provide a "Blueprint for Becoming an Employer of Choice" using six pillars. The pillars are as follows (paraphrased):

1. Ensure role clarity

2. Establish optimal structure and accountability
3. Establish core process excellence and standardize practices
4. Ensure real-time availability of appropriate equipment, supplies, and tools
5. Create a patient-centered environment
6. Design multiple patient care delivery models.

These pillars are well conceived and easily understood. Again, this is clearly a result of their extensive experience. On caution, Pillar Five is primarily focused at improving the environment (cleanliness of the rooms) through strengthening the bond between environmental workers (i.e. - housekeeping) and the caregivers. The point is well demonstrated, but the pillar name was somewhat misleading.

In summary, this text is well worth the short investment required to read 216 pages. It flows extremely well from problem to solution. Conclusions at the end of each chapter give it a journal feel and may be distracting, but are well written with main take-a-ways emphasized. Numerof and Abrams provide a great scenario (obviously borrowed from a recent success) to provide a capstone to the book. As the authors pronounce the necessity for a 36-month process for turning retention around, this book is a good first start.