

RETAINING YOUR DIGITAL TALENT

There has been a lot said around the digital skills shortage. Organizations strive to close the gap through hiring and upskilling, but the complexities of system development means that the gap endures. With the acceleration of technology development and the pervasive demands for digitization across all functions, it is unlikely that this shortage will change for many years. The market demand and the pace of change makes it too easy for leaders to excuse or blame their loss of talent on the market. It's time that leaders own their role in retaining and developing their digital talent. Our research shows that 65% of our clients reported that their retention challenges are about the same or less than other types of talent in their organization. What's more interesting, is that leadership was cited as the most significant reason for losing talent.

When something is new to us, or we don't fully understand it there are 3 ways we typically respond:

- Assume there is greater difference than actually exists - leaders throw their hands up and say Digital is unlike other functions.
- Minimize the difference and try to address novel challenges with the same solutions and then wonder why they don't work – we have provided them with a career path map.
- Focus on the bit that is easier to understand – we can't retain our talent because they want to develop their tech skills elsewhere.

Our study into digital talent shows that, whilst it may look and feel a bit different, digital talent 'needs' of their leaders boils down to our 3 core human needs of autonomy, competence and belonging. These are not unique to digital talent. The dynamic market just accentuates their significance, by providing more alternatives if your talent is dissatisfied. Leaders of digital teams face the same challenges as others- to create the space to lead their people. This places a greater spotlight on leaders who do not provide fundamental leadership through vision, meaningful engagement, coaching and feedback. While agile operating models go some way to addressing these needs, ultimately it comes down to the individual leader. If you are leading digital teams, or leading a People function partnering with digital talent, here are some practical tips to ensure you are and retain your people:

COMPETENCE

Humans all have an innate drive to master new challenges and develop new skills through experience. There is of course a range in the rate to which individuals want to build their competence. Within the context of rapid digital change, it is likely that those attracted to work in this sector come with a higher threshold for developing their competence. As a leader, you can channel this by:

- Ensure your team members have a variety of learning experiences, tap into your network to get them involved in smaller projects.
- Provide them learning experiences beyond digital -don't assume they only want technical skills, explore where their interests lie and enable different experience for their CV.
- Offer them frequent feedback; show that they are valued and recognized for what they uniquely bring to your team and the future potential you see in them.
- Remember the old adage "if you love something set it free..." Don't be tempted to hoard the talent in your team. Sharing your talent with other teams in the organization, means you are more likely to have that talent return to you when a new opportunity opens up.
- Let go of your ego. If you do not personally have the relevant technical skill a team member wants to develop, provide them with access to a mentor.

AUTONOMY

We all like to feel in control of our destinies. When it comes to digital functions, or tech companies, career paths are more dynamic and so sometimes it feels less transparent. In part driven by the type of people attracted to technology roles and in part the influence of millennials, digital talent have a

reputation for wanting independence. As a leader, you can meet this need by:


- Assign discreet ownership where possible. Find opportunities within a project to provide a sense of autonomy through end to end ownership of products or research.
- Coach your people to find their own answers. Yes, they may want to learn from your technical expertise but balance sharing your knowledge with coaching questions to develop their problem-solving skills.
- Show an interest in their career aspirations early and often. Leaders shy away from career conversations for fear of providing false expectations or prompting movement. Showing curiosity in longer term goals, can help you to connect today's learning with future goals.
- Partner with your peers to make pathways for progression more transparent.

BELONGING

Humans are tribal, we need a sense of connection and belonging. Again, the degree of connectedness individual's need, both in terms of quality and quantity varies – seeking to understand your team members' preferences is a good place to start. However, most people will be more motivated if they can see the link between their contribution to the overall picture of the company's success – now and in the future. The fast pace of the digital sector means that digital talent is attracted to companies with a clear vision that they can personally connect to, your role is to amplify and personalize that connection. As a leader you can:

- Inspire commitment by stepping out of the day to day problems to solve, to provide a sense of vision for the future, give them a sense of their role as individuals and as a team in that journey.

- Create a strong team culture. Bring your organization's values to life within your team through routines and rituals to create alignment and foster commitment and belonging.
- Make your people feel heard, sometimes those without the depth of technical skills can spot more creative solutions as they are not bound by legacy issues.
- Connect them to the sector. Share responsibility across your team to stay on top of new technologies and developments. Ensure those that want it are part of sector networks or are working toward accreditation.



Digital transformation and technology developments means that the challenge of attracting and retaining digital talent will not go away – it will only heighten. Organizations that stop blaming it on the individuals for making a move – and instead place greater accountability on their leaders to create the right conditions to retain and develop talent, will change the story around digital talent. Create conditions that provide your talent with a sense of belonging, give them space to feel autonomous and offer different experiences to grow their competence – and you will increase your retention rates.

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