

Overcoming the Employee Shortage: 6 Tips to Successfully Promote from Within

By Julie Markee, Key Process Innovations

The low unemployment rate has increased competition among employers for skilled workers. The best way to compete is to provide employees with opportunities for advancement, a chance to develop their skills, and a culture where people want to come to work. Last year, I wrote an article titled, “5 Keys to Attracting and Retaining Employees” for INCAST Magazine (available at keyprocessinnovations.com). In this article, I’m sharing the benefits and pitfalls of promoting from within your organization. I’ve seen this work well and I’ve seen it result in employees leaving the organization.

A few years ago, I was the Interim Director of Manufacturing for a mid-sized manufacturing company. The previous person in this role managed employees through fear and emotion, so workers were hesitant to step forward and take on more responsibility. As I began to address the issues within the plant, it was clear that we needed more supervisors and leads who could help direct the teams. I remember walking through the plant looking specifically for someone who wanted to do something more than piece work. One young man caught my eye, and after talking with him, I learned he was eager for an opportunity to grow with the organization.

I promoted him to a lead and put him in charge of the same team he had been working in. This young man had a desire to make things happen, but what I quickly realized was that he didn’t have the skill set to get things done with finesse. After he had an altercation with a difficult employee, I realized that I hadn’t given him the training or coaching to allow him to be successful in his new position. So, I took a step back, moved him to another team and started working with him on leadership

basics: communication style, ways to work with difficult employees and how to manage his time and workload. Over time, he grew into his role and has now moved into a supervisory position with the current management team.

I witnessed a similar situation with a different outcome while working with another company during a period of rapid growth. Shortly after I arrived, I began assessing employees, looking for those who had the ability to move up in the organization. It didn’t take long to identify a key employee that might leave if he wasn’t provided an opportunity for advancement. I made the recommendation to promote him with the caveat that he would need support in order to ensure his success, including coaching, goals and training. He was promoted but, unfortunately, wasn’t given the necessary support. After less than three months, he left the organization. The feedback from his exit interview revealed that he didn’t feel supported by the management team.

In another interim engagement, I inherited a management team that needed to be augmented. Based on the business climate, the only option was to promote from within. This time, I was determined to do everything I could to ensure success. After identifying the key employees who were ready to move up, we developed an organizational structure built around their strengths. These employees had the emotional maturity to handle the supervisory position but needed some training to bolster their skills. We also laid the foundation to ensure their continued success by setting goals for their first 90 days, scheduling weekly meetings with their manager to address any areas of weakness, and providing HR training on how to navigate the new role, including how to give feedback to employees,

how to have difficult conversations and how to make the transition from “buddy to boss.”

Once everyone was in alignment, we announced the reorganization and promotions to the plant. Immediately, you could feel the energy level increase within the plant. Within 30 days, productivity had increased by more than 10%. The new supervisors worked well together, and other employees noticed opportunities for advancement, which opened their eyes to what was possible within the organization.

Based on these experiences, I’d like to share the following tips on how to successfully promote from within an organization:

- 1 Be committed to success — for both the employee and the company. Expect bumps along with way but keep the focus on the goal of creating new leaders within the organization.
- 2 Lay out a plan for development. No one is born a good manager or supervisor, and everyone has areas that need to be developed. This plan should be developed with the employee.
- 3 Work the plan. Don’t develop the plan and let it fall by the wayside. If it needs to be modified along the way, modify it together.
- 4 Schedule regular meetings to touch base and discuss how things are going.
- 5 Keep track of what worked and what didn’t with the plan so you can improve as new employees are promoted.

6 Listen to your employees. There may be areas in their new role in which they aren't comfortable. It is important to get them to open up and talk about those areas so additional focus can be placed there.

Promoting from within has the benefit of putting someone in the role who knows the company, but it requires providing the right kind of support. Moving into a new role can be intimidating for a lot of people, and as managers, our responsibility is to provide the infrastructure and support necessary for success. The outcome of successfully implementing promotions from within can be increased productivity and an engaged workforce which results in a more competitive company.

About the Author

Julie Markee is an expert in aligning the key metrics in manufacturing to achieve extraordinary results. Her focus on process, people and priorities result in increased productivity, performance and profitability. Her projects yield an incredible return on investment allowing customers to reinvest in their company without investing capital. Learn more at www.keyprocessinnovations.com.



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