

**Ideas for Nebraska's  
Behavioral Health Workforce**

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# Retention Toolkit

**BHECN** | BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER  
OF NEBRASKA

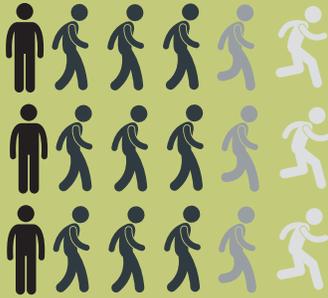
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# Retaining the workforce

Once you've gone to all of the work to find, interview and hire someone, it'd be nice if they stuck around a while. Yet turnover is a problem for many employers. Here are a few facts about retention and ways to keep your staff happy and working for you for years to come!

## 84%

of workers are looking to leave their jobs<sup>1</sup>



Surprisingly,  
89% of employers  
think workers leave  
for more money...



...but only 12% of  
employees do.<sup>2</sup>

## Why people leave



**75%** of those who quit, quit their boss – not their job<sup>3</sup>



**70%** of workers aren't engaged in their work<sup>4</sup>



**17%** leave because of bad management or a bad work environment<sup>5</sup>



**20%** leave because of a bad cultural fit<sup>5</sup>

## What can be done about it



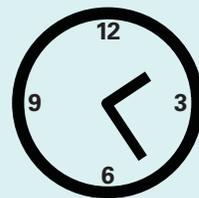
**Invest in better management**

**57%** of bosses learned leadership by trial and error on the job<sup>5</sup>



**Create better engagement strategies**

**90%** of companies say it's important, yet only 25% have a plan<sup>6</sup>



**Provide better coaching**

The best companies have **2x** the on-the-job training hours<sup>7</sup>



**Hire internally when you can**

Outside hires are **61%** more likely to be laid off or fired and 21% more likely to leave a job than internal hires<sup>8</sup>

1 CBS News

2 Leigh Branham, The Hidden Reasons Employees Leave

3 Roger Herman, Social Knows Employee Engagement Strategies

4 Gallup, State of the American Workplace

5 Gallup, Turning Around Your Turnover Problem

6 ACCOR, Building a Culture – The Importance of Senior Leadership

7 China Gorman, Great Place to Work

8 Matthew Bidwell, Paying More to Get Less. Administrative Science Quarterly

At BHECN, we are building a behavioral health workforce that meets the needs of Nebraska's residents. To do that, we know that every stage of the employment process – training, recruitment, continuing education, and retention – is critical to growing the workforce. Since BHECN's creation in 2009, we have worked to extend the training pipeline of students in a variety of disciplines, built continuing education opportunities, and helped identify barriers to recruitment. In this toolkit, we turn our attention to the central question on issue of retention: "Once we have someone trained and hired, how do we keep them employed?"

We began our research with the idea that we would review widely recognized best practices for employee retention and consolidate these into a format that is easy to use and understand. We discovered that many people are looking for this information and there is a great need for data regarding which retention practices are actually effective. Experts in Nebraska and across the world report that this topic is complex and in great need of further study.

We have contacted organizations in Nebraska and across the nation that specialize in health professions, rural healthcare, and workforce recruitment. All of these organizations struggle to answer the question: "What are effective retention practices for behavioral health professionals? Do effective practices differ between urban, rural and frontier areas?"

Without a definitive answer about effective practice, we turned our attention closer to home and interviewed behavioral health employers and employees across Nebraska. We have asked psychiatrists, psychologists, master's and bachelor's level professionals, and others what strategies and practices have been effective in retaining them in their current roles. Their responses are available on the website at <http://unmc.edu/bhecn/retention>.

We will to continue to gather information and provide regular updates on effective strategies for retention being used in Nebraska. We also plan to offer retention-related trainings that provide meaningful information to employers across the state.

This toolkit is only a starting place for employers looking for help retaining employees. We've collected a list of resources at the end of the document. If you find other resources, find something particularly helpful, or have questions or comments, please let us know.

For more information about this toolkit, contact:

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In Nebraska, there is a critical shortage of behavioral health professionals. Of the state's 93 counties, 88 are designated behavioral health professional shortage areas by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). To fill these gaps we must recruit more professionals and keep the professionals we already have. As we work to alleviate this shortage, we believe it is critical to understand those factors that influence employee turnover, retention and job satisfaction.



Common factors that influence employee turnover, retention and job satisfaction in behavioral health:



**Support** – Close ties and open communication with superiors, co-workers and mentors and connection with the community.

**Involvement** – A feeling of substantial investment in the organization.



**Innovation** – Enough flexibility to provide quality care.

According to our research, these factors help to shield professionals from the everyday pressures of the work such as high caseloads and severity of patient problems.



Other important factors include: availability of relief coverage; availability of quality housing; quality of public schools; availability of practice partners; employment opportunities for spouse or partner; student loan payback; and the opportunity to be a preceptor.

While competitive compensation and benefits must be in place in order to build and maintain a quality workforce, our research indicates that compensation is not closely linked with turnover, retention or job satisfaction.



National experts on employee retention have many suggestions and these are consistent with companies surveyed in Nebraska. Here are a few effective practices to improve retention:

**Self-evaluate** – Employers with low rates of turnover have one thing in common: they are willing to critically, honestly, and consistently evaluate their own performance and make improvements and changes. One Nebraska company regularly surveys its employees regarding job satisfaction. The company then openly plans for improvements based on these survey results and keeps employees updated on progress.

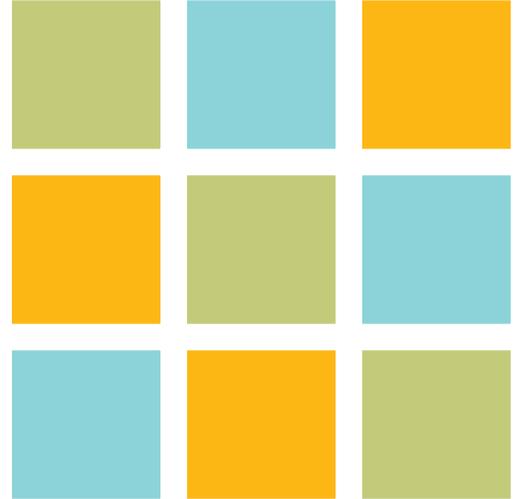
**Collect data** – If you have no means to measure what is happening, you have no way to plan for improvement. Exit interviews alone will not do the trick. Consider conducting “stay” interviews and work with top performers to identify what backgrounds, skills or personality characteristics your retainable employees have in common.

**Invest in training at all levels and give employees a path to grow** – Everyone in an organization needs continuing education and needs to have the time and resources to access this education. Even if promotion is not an option, be sure that all employees have opportunities for professional development. Give them new assignments and help them stretch their skills.

**Hire right in the first place** – Invest in recruitment efforts and consider an in-house referral program, promotion of mentor-mentee relationships, and engage with educational institutions in your community.

**Look for stressors and be proactive** – Rather than wait for stress to overwhelm a situation, be aware of those factors in the work environment that cause tension and discontent and communicate with employees about your plan to take action.

**Get serious about communication** - Employees must be able to speak frankly and offer ideas without fear of retribution. An open door policy is one thing, being fully engaged with your employees is another.

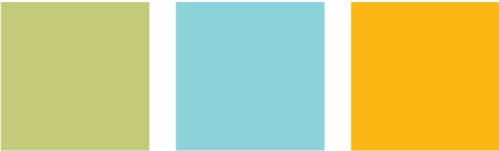


*Online extra: Watch John Turner describe some of the things his employer does to keep him engaged in his job:*  
<http://unmc.edu/bhecn/retention>



*Online extra: Watch Kristen Nelson talk about the flexibility and work/life balance her employer offers*  
<http://unmc.edu/bhecn/retention>





## Common themes from the research and interviews

1. Self-evaluate
  2. Collect data
  3. Investing in training at all levels and give employees a path to grow
  4. Hire right in the first place
  5. Look for stressors and be proactive
  6. Get serious about communication
  7. Be sure your employees know what you expect
  8. Set an example with a healthy work/life balance
  9. Make retention personal
  10. Evaluate your benefits often
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Be sure your employees know what you expect – Give your employees the metrics they need to know when they are successful and provide feedback on a regular basis. A Nebraska company shared that their employees would not be surprised by any information presented in a formal evaluation because feedback was provided on such a regular basis.

Set an example with a healthy work/life balance – Everyone talks about this, but they don't necessarily practice it in their own life. If you answer emails all weekend, your employees may believe this is the expectation for everyone in the organization. Employees at all levels will be most productive when they have a healthy work/life balance. Allowing the flexibility to occasionally take care of family needs during normal business hours helps employees feel valued as people.

Make retention personal – A one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

Evaluate at your benefits often – This doesn't necessarily mean they need to increase. Managers often think about what is most important to them and this may not be as important to their employees. A 62-year-old executive director will likely have different benefit priorities than a 25-year-old just starting their career.

## Research

Looking for more information and best practices on retention? Here are a few resources to get you started:

The Relationship between Work Environment Factors and Job Satisfaction Among Rural Behavioral Health Professionals, Destefano, Northern Arizona University, 2005, Journal of Rural Mental Health. <http://www.marshall.edu/jrcp/destefano.pdf>

Findings of the First Year Retention Survey of the Multi-State/NHSC Retention Collaborative. Pathman, Fannell, Konrad, Pierson, Tobrin, and Jonsson. November 5, 2012. <http://healthinfo.montana.edu/MTHWAC/multi-state-nhsc-retention-collaborative-final-report.pdf>

Retention Strategies and Incentives For Health Workers In Rural and Remote Areas: What Works? Humphreys, Wakerman, Pashen, and Buykx. Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute. November, 2009. [http://files.aphcri.anu.edu.au/research/international\\_retention\\_strategies\\_research\\_pdf\\_10642.pdf](http://files.aphcri.anu.edu.au/research/international_retention_strategies_research_pdf_10642.pdf)

Systematic Review of Effective Retention Incentives for Health Workers in Rural and Remote Areas: Toward Evidence-Based Policy. Buykx, Humphreys, Wakerman and Pashen. The Australian Journal of Rural Health 18, 102-109 (2010).

Enhancing the Peer Provider Workforce: Recruitment, Supervision and Retention, SAMHSA through the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, September 15, 2014. [http://www.nasmhpd.org/Meetings/TAC\\_Assessment\\_report\\_Page.aspx](http://www.nasmhpd.org/Meetings/TAC_Assessment_report_Page.aspx)

Study of the residents of the Nebraska Panhandle: Nene, Gibson, Bruce Johnson, Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Randolph Cantrell, Charlotte Narjes, and Rebecca Vogt. "Community Recruitment and Retention of New Residents: A Study Using a Market Assessment Process." The Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy 4.1 (2009): 1-27. <http://newprairiepress.org/ojrrp/vol4/iss1/7/>

Quits Are Up: 7 Employee Retention Strategies Your Company Must Have. Forbes, December 11, 2013. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/billconerly/2013/12/11/quits-are-up-7-employee-retention-strategies-your-company-must-have/>

Employee Retention – How to Retain Employees. The Wall Street Journal. <http://guides.wsj.com/small-business/hiring-and-managing-employees/how-to-retain-employees/>

7 Great Employee Retention Strategies. When I Work, October 8, 2013. <http://wheniwork.com/blog/7-great-employee-retention-strategies/>

## Loan repayment resources

Federal scholarship and loan repayment programs are available through the National Health Service Corps for behavioral health professionals: [http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew\\_orh\\_loansfed.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew_orh_loansfed.aspx)

The Nebraska Student Loan Program and the Nebraska Loan Repayment Program: [http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew\\_orh\\_loansstate.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew_orh_loansstate.aspx)

## Other Toolkits

Building Blocks for Behavioral Health Recruitment and Retention Overview, SAMHSA. <http://toolkit.ahpnet.com/>

Midwest Retention Toolkit, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin. The national Rural Health Resource Center and Retention Network. 2012. <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/primarycare/docs/idwestRetentionToolkit10412.pdf>

## Other Retention Resources

<http://www.whenworkworks.org/>  
<http://www.kpchr.org/>  
<http://www.familiesandwork.org/>

## Nebraska Resources

Nebraska Office of Rural Health: [http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew\\_orh.aspx](http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/hew_orh.aspx)



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