

## Hanging on to Your Competitive Advantage

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor  
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor The one element from the "Do more with fewer people and less money" mantra that may most severely affect your organization is "fewer people." And its effect will be much more severe than a downsizing order from the boardroom.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, by 2006 there will be 151 million jobs in America but there will be only 141 million workers. Although this may be good news for the technical knowledge worker, it is bad news for reliability and maintenance organizations.

Some managers are already wrestling with the problem. In fact, the Maintenance Excellence Roundtable, of which Maintenance Technology is a member, devoted part of its conference agenda to the subject. (Other members of the Roundtable are Alcoa, Allied Signal, Baxter Healthcare, Dofasco, Dupont, Exxon, Ford, Kodak, Novartis, Sunoco, and U.S. Postal Service.)

As was pointed out at the Roundtable, you will not be able to cover the shortfall by calling on contract service organizations because they draw their skilled maintenance workers from the same labor pool as your company.

Companies bidding for workers with scarce skills will fuel employee turnover. One important issue will be figuring out how to hang on to the good people you already have.

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Important insights to this retention challenge have been published by Kepner-Tregoe (www.kepner-tregoe.com), a Princeton, NJ, management consultancy, in its research monograph "Avoiding the Brain Drain: What Companies are Doing to Lock in Their Talent."

Kepner-Tregoe identified 11 "retention leaders" and derived a number of drivers of retention success from in-depth interviews with these companies. Several caught my attention:

- Retention leaders don't manage retention, they manage people. And they view people management as a strategic business issue. They know that employee knowledge is the only sustainable competitive advantage.
- Retention leaders are relentless in their pursuit of continuous improvement. All of these companies keep asking questions, soliciting feedback, and taking actions to maintain a high level of satisfaction among their workers.
- Retention leaders have a culture of caring, balanced with a tradition of excellence. On one hand, they place a high value on integrity, ethical behavior, and truth in all their dealings, including their treatment of and communication with their employees. On the other hand, they all have a rock-solid tradition of holding employees to a standard of business excellence.

Start building your retention strategy today to keep from being sucked down the brain drain. **MT**

