

I Love It Here

How Great Leaders Create Organizations Their People Never Want to Leave

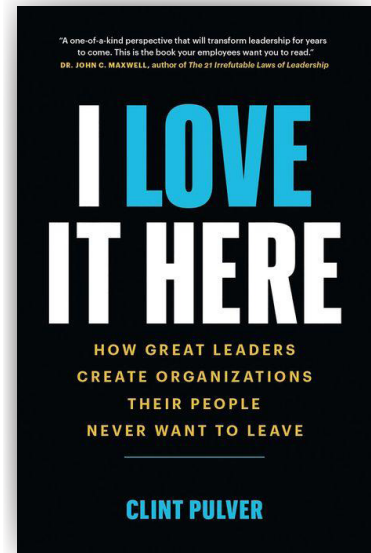
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Understand employee needs.* Make workers your top priority. Get to know each of your key workers as unique individuals. Give vocal praise, awards, and gifts to show appreciation.
- *Be a mentor manager.* Lead from within by standing shoulder to shoulder with your staff. When possible, promote from inside your company. Use a one-on-one approach to inspire and coach promising employees to reach their full potential.
- *Create an ownership environment.* Give your workers a stake by involving them in future plans and hires. Allow flexible schedules. Invite them to contribute ideas and, when possible, give them additional responsibilities.
- *Use status interviews.* Check in periodically with employees with informal talks where you ask about their needs, and let them know you're prepared to act on their behalf.

OVERVIEW

Companies are built on people, so it can be devastating when talented and skilled employees leave your organization for greener pastures. In **I Love It Here**, Clint Pulver details methods to increase employee retention and loyalty by harnessing the power of small moments to engage talent. The book is ideal for leaders who want to identify, nurture, and preserve staff by creating a workplace environment where talent can thrive.

A SINGLE MOMENT IN TIME

So many companies experience high rates of employee turnover because managers fail to understand what employees experience and feel in the workplace. While some companies use feedback forms or

surveys to try to gauge workers' feelings, most employees are justifiably afraid of going on the record with their honest opinions. Close to 30 percent of all employees quit their jobs in 2020. Of these, 78 percent left for preventable reasons.

The *Undercover Millennial* program penetrates the workforce by sending in young people who pose as job seekers. An applicant finds an authentic employee and expresses interest in applying for a job. A set series of questions is used to gauge elements such as satisfaction, pay, management, and work environment. Typical questions include:

- How much do you love working here on a scale of 1–10?
- What's the number one drawback?
- What's the best thing about working here?

The agents go on to collect data from hundreds of other workers in the organization to compile a list of actionable ideas a company can take to improve employee retention and satisfaction. Your goal is to follow the principles discovered by these Undercover Millennials to provoke an enthusiastic "I love it here!" when someone asks your employees about your organization.

ARE YOU THE PROBLEM OR THE SOLUTION?

Employee turnover is a big problem, costing U.S. companies over half a billion dollars in 2019. It costs about half an employee's annual salary to replace them with a trained, entry-level worker. Replacing a supervisor or manager can be much more expensive. Most workers have no fear about quitting their jobs.

Mistakes managers make when it comes to retaining employees include the following:

- They use a "one-size-fits-all" approach to employee retention and fail to see that each employee is an individual with unique standards and needs.
- They accept high worker turnover as inevitable.
- They consider employees expendable and concentrate on hiring and training.
- They ask employees for feedback using ineffective forms or questionnaires.

Show your workers they're needed and valued. Real engagement is based on genuinely knowing and demonstrating the value that each of your employees brings to your organization.

CREATING YOUR DREAM TEAM

Individual excellence isn't enough to take your team or organization to the top. You need *group interplay*, the cohesiveness and creativity that comes with putting the right people in the right places for the right job. When you create a "dream team," you can engage with each member to maximize their recognition and satisfaction. Follow these four principles:

1. *Hire the right person, not the easy one.* Never settle when building your team. Drop the idea that you can make do with whoever's on hand. Keep a mindset of "always recruiting" and accept being short staffed over inadequate hires.
2. *Hire internally when possible.* Hire from within to get someone who's already connected and engaged in your organization. When you promote internally, you preserve the continuity of your company culture and show other employees that upward movement is possible.

3. *Use the ABCs of hiring.* Watch for **attitude**, **behavior**, and **character** when making new hires. These qualities are as important as technical ability. Since these skills are difficult to spot on a résumé, use interview questions to gauge the candidate.
4. *Let your employees focus.* Assign tasks to employees that match their skills and interests. To find out more about your workers, ask them about their dreams, ambitions, and priorities. Base assignment changes on your findings.

Getting the right people on your team is the first step. Next, you need to ensure that your team operates on a basis of trust and mutual reliance.

THE MENTOR MANAGER

Each type of manager creates certain conditions and gets unique results. Examine these four types and decide which best describes your style:

1. The *removed manager* is frequently missing in action. These types do just enough to get by and consider themselves “above” manual labor. Expect large employee turnover here.
2. The *buddy manager* prioritizes being accepted and approved of by employees. These managers fix things, rescue people, and bend the rules for special employees. It can be tough for them to make difficult decisions or face disapproval.
3. The *controlling manager* has high expectations for staff but feels little or no connection to them. If you find yourself saying or believing “my word is the law,” then you’re probably a controller type.
4. The *mentor manager* works with this or her staff, constantly striving to improve from within. Mentor managers use one-on-one coaching, prioritize employee goals, focus on their teams as much as their objectives, and walk the walk right along with those they supervise.

Only mentor managers can sustain a style that involves high expectations and high connections. Every member of your staff wants to be a better employee, and they have skills and abilities that aren’t yet fully developed. It’s your job to mentor them to full capacity.

SPARKING THE POSSIBILITY

Your employees find value and merit in recognition for their work. They want to know they’re appreciated and needed. It’s your job to create a culture of recognition in your organization, which you can do by employing the following strategies:

- *Give vocal praise.* Tell your employees that you value their unique contributions, and why.
- *Provide experiences.* Give your employees access to incredible places and events. Don’t just offer them money; offer them buzz-worthy experiences.
- *Give toys and gifts.* If you give an employee something fun like a GoPro, a new running suit, or a fascinating book, he or she will remember it. Choose gifts that suit the employee as an individual and be careful to respect gender, racial, and cultural boundaries.
- *Offer awards.* When you recognize an employee, be sure to personalize the award for his or her particular job or skill. Even something as simple as mentioning the employee in a monthly newsletter for a job well done can be a huge boost.

When you want to encourage growth in a particular employee, look for one of these four types of growth opportunities:

1. *Call out their potential.* If you let promising workers know what you see in them, it can inspire a greater sense of recognition and loyalty.
2. *Make simple investments.* Offering simple things like new devices, books, or streamlined instructions can boost employee morale.
3. *Arrange training.* Send promising workers to workshops, seminars, or classes that will help bring out their potential.
4. *Offer your advocacy.* Show your employees that you want to help them reach their dreams by connecting them with new opportunities.

Whenever you have the chance to do so, create a moment where your employees' potential and worth is acted on. Make it personal.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The best managers are available for their staff. This means you need to keep things simple so you can serve the most people effectively. These four steps can simplify and strengthen your management skills:

1. *Cut your meetings in half.* Substitute texts or emails for meetings.
2. *Cut workplace stressors.* Watch out for rigid managers, low salaries, too much work, lack of staff support, and low opportunity for promotion.
3. *Cut the clutter.* Clean up common areas like breakrooms, restrooms, stairways, and supply closets. Make sure your people have what they need to work, but avoid cramming your workplace.
4. *Cut bad habits.* Encourage exercise, provide healthy snacks, and make sure everyone has easy access to water.

Keep your values simple as well. Let people know in plain terms what the company and its people stand for.

ALWAYS BE FLYING THE AIRPLANE

Think of your employees as airplanes. You need to keep each of them stable enough to continue flying. It's important to touch base with workers by holding periodic status interviews. Fashion these as short, friendly conversations designed to gauge how happy or unhappy a given employee may be. Ask these three questions:

1. *What can I do to keep you here?* Be sure to praise your employee before asking this question; let the person know you value his or her work.
2. *What's stopping you from reaching your full potential?* Be prepared to act on the answers you receive. Before asking this question, be sure you have the tools, authority, and knowledge to act.
3. *How can I help you get where you want to be?* When asking this question, be sure your employee fully understands you're acting as an advocate for him or her.

There are no shortcuts in getting to know your workers. You need to put in the time and emotional investment to really understand who they are and how they feel.

BRACE FOR IMPACT

Crisis can strike an individual worker or your entire company. As a leader, you must be ready to ride out any emergency or disruption. Your main goal is to preserve continuity and provide empathy. Show that

you put employee welfare first and be realistic about what you can promise to do to help. Here are some additional tips for supporting an employee who's facing a crisis:

- Assume the person is doing his or her best during a difficult time.
- Decide if certain standards or responsibilities can be temporarily adjusted.
- Be trustworthy and maintain confidentiality.
- Listen closely and completely to what the person has to say before giving advice.

When your company, town, or country faces a crisis, your first priority is to preserve a sense of hope in the face of uncertainty. If you can manage it, try to maintain an emergency fund to ride out hard times that might impact your organization.

YOUR PERSONAL BOARD OF MENTORS

Your abilities as a mentor don't come down to how much people like you or how often they want to spend time with you. Instead, your success depends on the *five Cs* of mentorship:

1. **Confidence.** You must show that you believe in yourself, in the skills you teach, and in your ability to lead others.
2. **Credibility.** People need to know you have the résumé, education, and experience necessary for the job.
3. **Competence.** Don't just say; do. When people see you perform with excellence, you gain their respect and trust.
4. **Candor.** Workers need to know that you can and will be honest with them no matter how awkward or painful it may be.
5. **Caring.** Without a true connecting between two people, real mentoring can't take place. Be fearless in showing your personal involvement and care for your workers.

If you fill your workers with a sense of purpose backed by simple values, match them to the right tasks, and reward them for their excellence, your employee turnover rate will decrease dramatically. As a mentor manager, your focus should always be on sparking the potential of those you lead. If you lead honestly with confidence, you'll have workers who remain satisfied and loyal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clint Pulver is a professional keynote speaker, author, musician, pilot, and workforce expert. Known as the leading authority on employee retention, he has transformed how corporations like Keller Williams, AT&T, and Hewlett Packard create lasting loyalty through his work and research as the Undercover Millennial. Pulver has been featured by *BusinessQ* magazine as a Top 40 Under 40, and, as a professional drummer, he has appeared in feature films and on *America's Got Talent*. In 2020, he won an Emmy Award for his short film *Be a Mr. Jensen*, which tells the story of how a single moment in time—and one particular mentor—can change the course of a life.

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