

HEALTHY BUSINESS

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## Staff-shortage crisis: How to keep the staff that you have



**To keep abreast of the staff-shortage crisis, retailers need to invest in their most valuable asset: current employees.**

With staff shortages causing havoc across the retail industry, employee-retention strategies are being used by savvy operators who understand the value that staff bring to a business.

While the worst of the impacts caused by lockdowns are hopefully behind us, shortages continue to plague the industry. Research from the Australian Retailers Association (ARA) reveals that the search for new employees has got steadily worse.

Paul Zahra, CEO of Australian Retailers Association, says the retail industry recorded the highest increase in job vacancies out of any other industry during the pandemic, highlighting the dire situation many businesses are facing.

"Staff absences due to sick leave from COVID and the flu are adding to the current woes of retailers with labour shortages crippling the economy," he says. "There are over 40,000 job vacancies in retail trade alone – an increase of 38.5 per cent in just three months."

Along with COVID-related shortages, there is a clear need for international students to return and fill the gaps in retail and hospitality, Zahra says.

"COVID and the flu are significant factors in the current staffing challenge, however businesses are also constrained by the lack of skilled foreign workers coming into the country along with international students, which have always supplemented the Australian workforce. These workers are key to filling frontline roles as well as more specialist positions in growth areas of data and digital."

# Valuable assets

Corporate Dojo's Karen Gately, an HR expert for the retail sector, says employee retention is paramount in the current climate.

"Staff shortages are clearly an issue for many places at the moment – so make sure you are looking after the people that you've got," she says.

That doesn't have to mean hefty bonuses or financial rewards for staying put. The best incentives are those that provide staff with a full and rounded experience at work, she adds.

"It's really all about culture and people's experiences on a day-to-day basis in the workplace," says Gately. "Remember, finding a new staff member is a lot harder than keeping the ones that you've got."

Benefits that don't involve cash outlay at the start could include learning opportunities – investing in staff training sends a strong message that they are valued, Gately says.

"Just paying more money doesn't necessarily mean you will fix the problem – there's often somebody that's willing to pay more – and clearly a lot of small businesses just can't afford it, so they should be focusing on making the work experience a positive and rewarding one."

Casting a wide net in the search for staff is also a good tactic, says Gately.

"The starting point is to really think through the type of person that you're looking for and the level of experience you need and then think about who might know them.

"Just putting ads on online job boards is clearly an option, but I think given it's so tight to find people, employers need to really go through who they know and then work out how to connect with them."

This could include professional networks, such as LinkedIn, or more organic networks such as local sporting clubs. Tapping into university student pools is also another way to spread the word.

Most important though, adds Gately, is showing appreciation to your current staff.

"If you are short staffed and you're asking a lot of the people that you've got, make sure your staff genuinely recognise that you appreciate how they are helping to keep the business going."