

Tool Kit on Recruitment & Retention in Social Services Sector

Recruitment and retention are the key business strategy aspects for any company whether or not they are facing staffing shortages and issues. This is especially crucial in the social services sector, where the business is built by people and around people. Recruitment and retention are interrelated and they both influence the image of an organization and the industry as a whole through factors that affect each, such as working conditions. With the right approach to recruitment, supported by a comprehensive retention strategy, application rates will increase and turnover rates will decrease, both key in reducing the issues that the social services sector is currently facing in regards to staffing.

Developing a sound practice for recruitment and retention should be a critical activity for every organisation, as it influences not only the attractiveness of the company, but also the reputation of the whole industry and it should be approached with the same level of preparation as any other business decision.

The Tool Kit developed provides an organisation with an overview of the major steps an organisation needs to take in order to be successful in the recruitment and retention strategies. The specific focus is on how to attract potential candidates, especially young workers, and how to keep workers longer within your organization. The Tool Kit includes descriptions of processes and practices to implement, as well as notes, tips and success stories for the related strategies.

Recruitment

As mentioned above, attracting and recruiting the right people is of major importance for every organisation. The information in this part dedicated to recruitment draws on Michael Armstrong's "A Handbook of Human Resources Management Practice" and project team's experience from the field of recruitment and selection. This section will follow the steps in the Pathway to Recruitment, with the main focus on the third step of "Attracting Candidates".

Pathway to Recruitment



Step 1: Planning

Identification of current and future needs in employees can help a company to start the process of recruitment long before the person is needed on board, helping to ensure the position can be more easily filled when the need arises.

Before filling a position, whether it is a newly created opening or an existing position, the organisation shall start its planning process by identifying which tasks and responsibilities the person will perform,

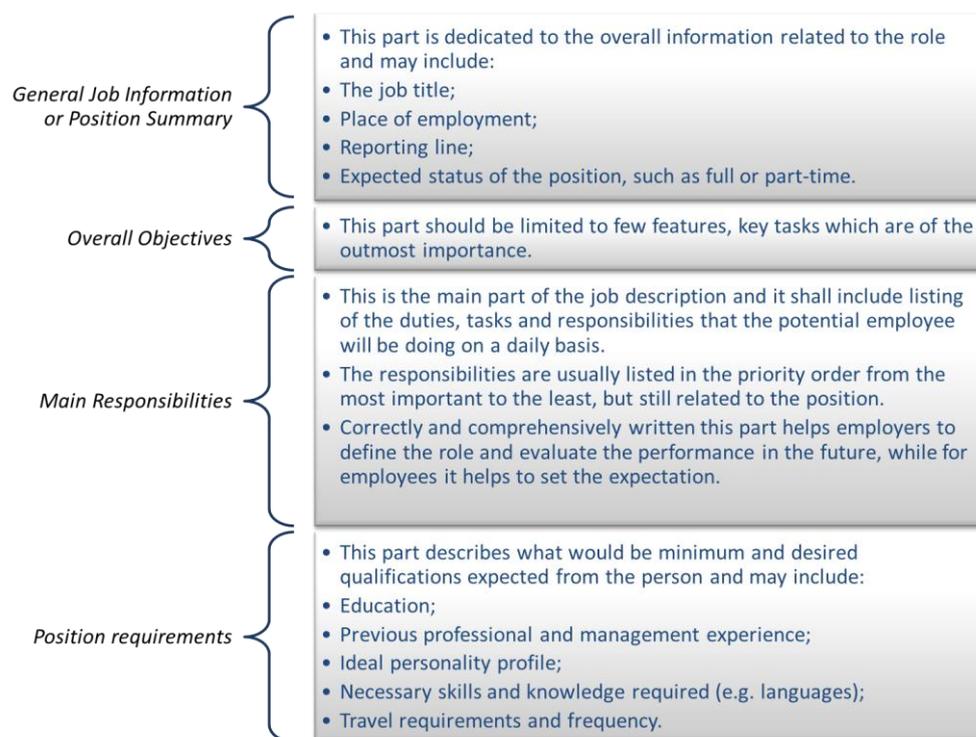
what the expectations from the role and the main requirements are as well as what kind of skills are needed to perform the role effectively. Each of these will help in the next step of developing job description and specifications.

Step 2: Developing job descriptions and specifications

As the result of the job analysis exercise which the company performs during the planning process, a job description should be developed. It broadly describes the job – the purpose, the duties, the scope, responsibilities and tasks to be completed. Thoughtful consideration should be given to the job descriptions to ensure the vacancy is clearly depicted and the right candidates are interested.

While job description is about ‘what’ is expected from the person on the position, job specification is about ‘who’ is required for the position, listing the necessary and desirable criteria for the selection.

For the job description and job specifications the following structure can be recommended:



Step 3: Attracting candidates

Within the social services sector, currently one of the biggest issues with recruitment is an ability to attract new candidates. This section has been split into two areas: internal and external recruitment.

Internal recruitment

1. Hiring Within

- a. When a position becomes available within an organization, looking at the internal pool of candidates is often the first step. By providing internal job advancements, an organisation gives employees an incentive to stay with the company, and by first being loyal to the employees, it helps in turn increase their loyalty to their employer. Searching internally also minimizes recruitment efforts and costs.

2. Referral Programs

- a. Creating incentives for employees to refer qualified potential employees is a good way to involve staff and reduce recruiting time and efforts.
- b. A bonus can be offered to the employees if they find a candidate that is hired.
- c. Information spread about the organization - more people learn about the organisation.
- d. High chance of better qualified individual as the employees recommending potential hires know the day to day job and should recommend someone capable of handling it.

Note: One desirable quality in an organization for potential recruits is the ability to move within the company, either vertically or horizontally. As the research presented in section 3 “An Overview of the Social Services Sector in Europe” shows, many employees in this industry feel they have no career mobility.

External recruitment

External recruitment is an excellent opportunity for a company to explore potential candidates available on the market. There are many ways to identify and attract potential candidates, such as:

1. Word of Mouth

The network of people whom an organisation might know within the sector could be a tremendous starting point. It is always good to contact those people and ask them for the references. There should also be an umbrella association, which is guiding social services sector in a country, whom an organisation may contact and ask for an advice.

2. Local Media Advertising

It is a highly effective tool in most countries. Placing ads on local job boards, in newspapers, magazines and other media channels is a good way to reach a wide audience of people. As many people consider job opportunities based on the location of the future job, it is more likely that people who read local press will be living not far from an organisation and willing to consider the opportunity based on the factor of future location of the job.

Examples:

- “The local press is the best as a large number of people see the advert, perhaps even people who were not necessarily looking for a job.” Residential care home with nursing – private sector.

Source: Ekosgen, 2013

- A number of Social Services organizations interviewed by the project team mentioned advertising in local press as a primary search channel for potential candidates.

Source: Interviews with Social Service organizations, 2013

3. Internet Advertising

In today's world, online job advertisements are some of the most widely seen. Internet-based job boards, online classifieds, forums especially those that have country-wide or European coverage (e.g. Monster, EURES, etc.) can all be used to reach potential recruits. Any job vacancies should also be placed on organisation's own website first.

4. Social Media

The use of social media in recruiting new applicants can be exceptionally helpful when looking for younger workers. Most of the "generation Y" workers are heavily connected to social media, be it through Facebook, Twitter, Linked In or others. Facebook specifically offers targeted ways of advertising to groups of people based on interest, location, age, etc. Additionally, by creating a Facebook page, it gives people a chance to follow what an organization is doing and spread the word.

Example: Kiva and Facebook

As a nonprofit organization that operates a person-to-person micro-lending program, Kiva has greatly benefited from having a Facebook profile. Having a Facebook profile communicates to today's jobseekers that an organization is nimble and responsive to current trends. Additionally, extending an organization's network using Facebook can help when hiring. For example, an organization can post its open positions on a page that is instantly viewable to literally millions of users. Furthermore, an organization can search member profiles to identify and reach out to prospective candidates or to glean more information about those that have already applied to a position at their organization.

Source: Recruiting 2.0: Using Online Social Networking to Attract Top Talent, Commongood Careers

5. Public Employment Services

In most of the countries there are public employment service providers who work closely with potential candidates and unemployed persons seeking work. With a broad variety of people, they could be useful to work with to find potential candidates. Some examples are Jobcentre Plus in the UK or VDAB in Belgium. These organizations can help a company clearly identify which people that they work with would be interested in social services jobs.

Example: Jobcentre Plus and Skills for Care partnership - route-way to entry to social care

Skills for Care and Jobcentre Plus have worked together to provide a national sector route-

way for adult social care.

The route-way offers support to unemployed people interested in a career in adult social care to give them the skills and confidence required to move into entry level roles in the sector. Throughout the 60-hour course, learners develop their communication and employability skills and learn about the values and principles that are central to all types of work in the social care sector. They also learn about the different types of job opportunities and career development options that are available, hopefully getting a real feel for the social care sector by the time they complete the course.

Source: Adult social care workforce, recruitment and retention strategy, Skills for Care, 2011

6. Partner with Schools, Colleges and Universities

Establishing contacts with educational entities in the region can allow organizations to have direct access to graduating students and the ability to present them with job opportunities.

There are several useful ways to reach a greater number of potential recruits:

- a. Internships & volunteer opportunities for “hands-on” experience
- b. Guest speakers & ambassadors to teach and represent the social services sector
- c. Recruitment events and job fairs
- d. On-the-job training for new graduates

This provides graduates with the opportunity to work directly after school without work experience

Example: Care Ambassadors – using current staff to champion careers in social care

The Care Ambassador schemes were created and developed by Skills for Care. These schemes are now nationally recognized for the work they do in raising the profile of careers in social care. Care Ambassadors are qualified and experienced care workers who promote the image of social care and act as role models to inspire and encourage people of all ages to consider careers in the sector.

Care Ambassadors across the country are involved in programs of working with schools, colleges, the Society Health & Development Diploma and Apprenticeship partnerships, and a wide range of community groups and organizations such as Jobcentre Plus and Connexions. They offer guidance and advice on available career opportunities available, and help to facilitate creative work experience placements in a wide range of care services and settings.

Source: Adult social care workforce, recruitment and retention strategy, Skills for Care, 2011

7. Attracting Workers from Other Regions

Sometimes if a specific employee profile cannot be found locally, looking outside of the local region can be beneficial. An organization can do this by using some of the suggested above

steps but for these specific countries (local press, job-boards, local public employment service provider, local universities and colleges, etc.). However, a company needs to be aware of the additional costs, which may arise in case of relocation of the potential employee, as well as the time needed to get work/residence permit and approval of the qualification.

Tip: Offer language courses. For workers coming from other countries within the EU, language may still be an issue. By providing access to language courses during the induction stages of training, an organization can help attract qualified workers from within different areas of Europe and integrate them quicker.

8. Focus on Underrepresented Populations in the Workforce

Targeting recruiting and campaigning at areas of the work force that are underrepresented in the social services sector can help increase number of applicants. Most organizations have an imbalance of female and male workers. To attract more men to the job, an organisation should have specific ads targeted at men or campaigns showing why men can benefit from building a career in this sector. In some cases an organisation may consider hiring elder people, early retired, disabled or minority groups' representatives. Today, many OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) members have increased pension eligibility age, thus having more people working longer.

Example: Valuing and developing older staff members

Pembroke Hotel for the retired cares for 18 older people and currently employs 15 staff. A key philosophy of the Pembroke Group is to recognize and appreciate the contribution older staff members play in developing a well-trained motivated staff team. Joan Taylor has been working for the Pembroke for the past 15 years, after she retired from a hospital career. She is now 80 years old. As an important member of the team, Joan is keen to continually develop her skills and is enthusiastic to participate in any training offered to her.

Source: Adult social care workforce, recruitment and retention strategy, Skills for Care, 2011

Step 4: Selection process

After applications have been received, there are two main steps in the process of selecting a candidate: the pre-selection process and assessment of selected candidates.

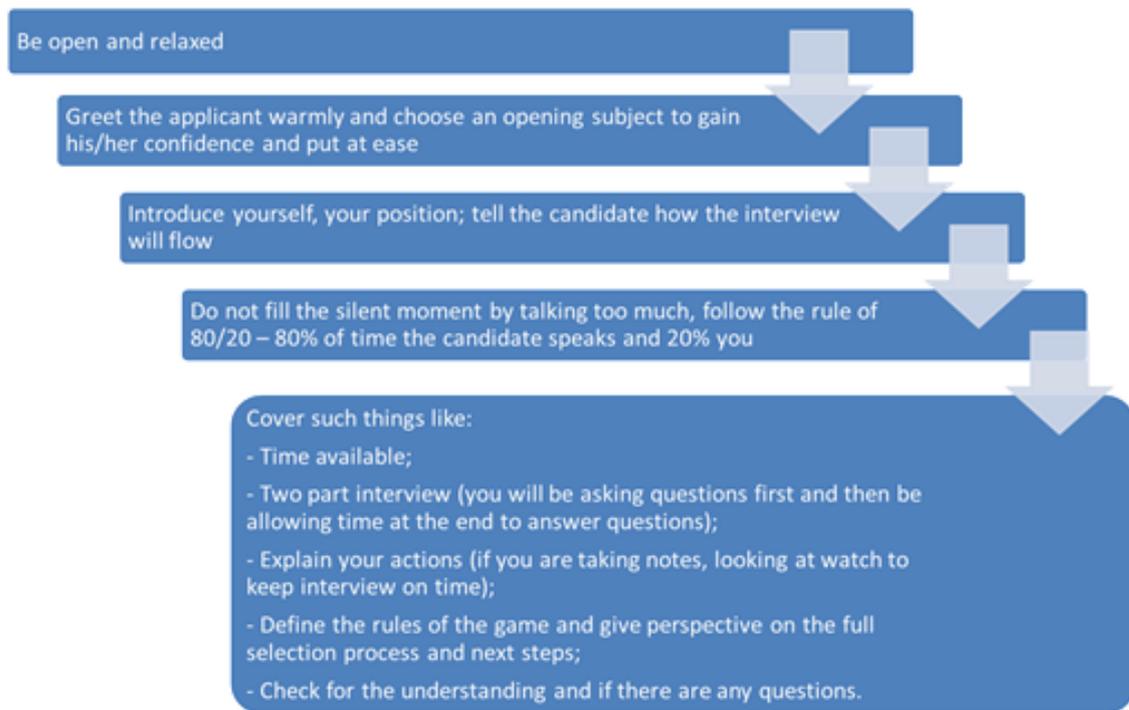
Pre-selection process

This process involves selecting a short-list of candidates based on CVs and applications that match the desire profile. These people will be taken to the next step of the selection process.

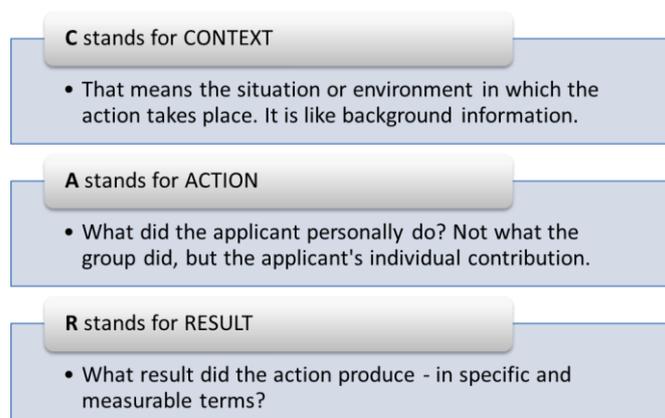
Another option if the candidate pool is manageable is a telephone interview. This allows interaction with the candidate, and a first chance to begin assessing further than the CV. It also allows time to ask questions to fill any information gaps in the application. However, this should not substitute a face-to-face interview.

Interviewing

There are a variety of different methods of how a company may assess the job-seekers, among them – interview, tests, assessment centre, case studies, etc. Often a combination of several methods may take place. Face-to-face interviews are the most commonly used method of selection within the social services sector. The following figure provides a basic overview of interviewing guidelines for company's representative:



As a supplement to the interview, a behavioural interview could also be beneficial in this sector to evaluate how potential employees would perform on the job. A useful tool to assess candidates while conducting behavioural interviews is the following CAR concept:



Source: NI, internal training, 2009

Step 5: Decision and offer making

After the interviewing process, decisions should be made as soon as possible, selecting the candidate that best suits the needs of the organization. If applicable, references should be checked from previous places of employment. When a decision is made the organization should take the time to contact each applicant and inform him or her of the results, whether successful or unsuccessful. All offers of employment should be made in writing to the candidate.

Retention

A high turn-over rate faced within the social services sector leaves employers constantly searching to fill open positions, which requires an investment in recruitment, time for interviewing and hiring, and training any new employees. An important factor in the social services sector is new creative approaches to the retention of employees. According to a study on retention strategies in the social services sector done by Skills for Care in January 2013, employers with a strong reputation have the most success in retaining their employees. This reputation comes from various factors that lead to what are considered good working conditions, all of which help increase the retention of employees. There is not one tool that can be used. "But rather, it is combination of [different tools] that leads to the generation of supporting, motivational and rewarding working environments" (ekosgen, 2013).

Below, different tools have been outlined that can be used to help improve the retention of employees within an organization.

Morale Enhancement

An important facet of employee retention is ensuring that they want to come to work. The rate of burn out within the social services sector is high. By working to improve morale among the employees an organization helps their perception, encourages them to stay with the company rather than go to another employer, and enhances the reputation, which leads to more applications for open positions and less unfilled positions that decreases morale within the workplace. The following suggestions can be used to help create a sense of a team within the organization, provide non-monetary incentives as a reward for good work and enhance the employees' opinion of their job and employer.

1. Increase time working with service users

- a. Reduce amount of time spent on paperwork through the introduction of new software or technology to simplify the paperwork

Note: One of the main influencers for joining social services is the non-material rewards of helping others. Currently, most carers only spend 15% of their time with service users, meaning the rest is spent doing various administrative tasks (Burke 2012), meaning very little time is focused on the development of a relationship with the service users. The lack of time spent with service users demotivates workers, driving high turnover rates.

Suggestion: Set a minimum time requirement for visits. It is recommended in The Social Work Blog on CommunityCare.co.uk that a minimum of an hour be set per visit, and 45 minutes in exceptional

cases (McGregor, 2013).

2. Connections with local schools, training centres to provide health and well-being services for employees

- a. Massage therapy schools, physical therapy, counsellors, etc.

Note: Many social service positions can be very physically demanding and working with service users can often be emotionally or mentally draining. By creating connections with these services, an organization provides its employees with opportunities that they may not be able to afford or have time for on their own. Many schools, training centers or freshly certified practitioners are looking for ways to gain experience. This could provide a win-win opportunity.

3. Team building events to increase camaraderie in the work place and create the feeling of a “team” despite individual work efforts

These events can be both social and professional. Having a speaker within the industry come to talk about new methods being used, bringing in someone to work on motivation, or personal skills, such as self-esteem or determination. These types of activities are used quite often within Direct Sales networks at conventions as a way to bring members of the organization together even though they each run their individual business. It creates a sense of teamwork and a support system in a demanding job.

4. Non-work related team gatherings (e.g. BBQs, family picnics, etc.)

5. Promote healthy living strategies to help employees take care of themselves in a physically demanding job

- a. Incentives for coming to work by bike
- b. Team work-out sessions
- c. Access to healthy eating guidelines and suggestions

Training, Education, Career Path & Mobility

1. Clear induction training for new employees

Note: The introduction of a very clear induction training program can help not only with recruitment, but also with retention. It opens possibilities for recruitment to include younger workers out of school with less work experience. It also sets the stage that the employer is investing in the training of its employees. Continued training and education is considered highly valued by social care workers (ekosgen, 2013).

2. New skills training

Building on solid induction training, through the course of the employees' career with the organization, the opportunities for trainings are crucial. Most employees in this sector want to continue to advance their skills and knowledge.

- a. Leadership trainings

- b. IT skills training
- c. New methods, ways of working, etc.

Note: One option to offer trainings on a low budget is to connect with other local organizations that are looking to provide trainings on similar skills. By working together, care givers can attend the same trainings and the costs can be shared.

3. Changing social service sector training

Under the pressure from funding bodies the nature of many social service providers begins to change which creates a shift from a “help providing” mentality to a result-oriented approach. This can mean not only less time spent with the service users, but also the reporting and expectations of specific results, such as someone in vocational training finding a job in a set time frame. For workers that have been in the sector for some time, this shift can be difficult to deal with and organizations experiencing this challenge should provide training and sessions to help their employees understand how to handle this transition.

Additional training might also need to be provided as the nature of funding changes to include or exclude certain activities with service users.

4. Introduction of mentorship programs

This can be especially useful for new employees, pairing them with more experienced employees that can show them how things are done. It provides a sense of teamwork and hands-on training for the new employees.

5. Introduction of career path strategies

This is especially important for young workers. According to the article “5 Ways to Retain Gen Y Workers” by Dan Schawbel, if young workers are not given future opportunities within the organization, they will find somewhere else to work (Open Forum, 2012). A suggestion from this article that has worked well within the corporate world is the creation of internal hiring programs. This not only gives employees the opportunity to advance, but also decreases recruitment efforts and expenses associated with bringing in an external recruit. This could be done by creating new positions within the organization to allow front line workers to move up to a position of a group manager or a coordinator, leading and organizing a group of front line workers. Another important aspect is related to horizontal career ladders. Not all frontline employees are interested in or have the ability to move up the vertical ladder, but in order to keep their interest in the work they perform, horizontal moves can be useful. Horizontal moves include changes in workplace (closer to the home of a care worker), similar work but with other types of users, or a deeper specialisation (for example in nutrition, etc.).

Success Story: One of the Social Service Providers organization in Scotland introduced a clearly defined career path opportunity for its frontline workers. If interested and qualified for a promotion an employee can move up from a frontline worker to a team leader and then to a manager. This practice proved to be attractive for young people joining the organization.

In Belgium, structures exist to help staff who want to advance from the frontline familial (household) helper to care giver and eventually to nurse. These structures can provide in financial help for the education or education during the working hours.

Source: Interviews with Social Service organisations, 2013

6. Encouraging workers to continue their education on their own

- a. Providing computers with internet access and good training sources at the office

Compensation

While wage is not considered the most important factor for most social workers, it does still factor in. And it is a reason why many potential employees chose to work in the public and private sector where salaries are generally higher than in the social services sector. By at least offering a living wage during recruitment and following-up with proper compensation for overtime work or undesirable hours organisations can encourage people to stay within the sector and more specifically, within the organization.

1. Pay for overtime work and undesirable work time (evenings, weekends, holidays)

2. Including travel time as part of paid working hours

- a. Have a set rate for all employees for mileage paid

Note: In the UK, these suggestions were put forth in a debate in March 2013 by liberal democrat Andrew George. The debate focused on how to improve the basic working conditions of the social care sector (The Social Work Blog, CommunityCare.co.uk).

Communication Channels

1. Open-door policy with management.

- a. Provide forums for offering feedback, complaints, suggestions and compliments

2. One-on-one time with employees to discuss evaluations, their career and future opportunities

With the new generation of workers, “millennials”, their expectations from employers have shifted. “Millennials expect loyalty from their employer, whereas [baby] boomers gave loyalty”

(Schawbel, Forbes, 2011). Young workers expect face time with their employers. To be able to retain and keep them involved in the organization it is important to show them that as the employer you are investing in their career and their future at the organization.

Note: Studies show that 60% of generation Y employees expect daily contact with their employer and regular feedback (Forbes.com)

3. Team member meetings

- a. Weekly or monthly meetings with team members to discuss their work with each other, providing suggestions, sharing cases, techniques, etc.
- b. This can help create a sense of community among the workers and provide them with outlets to talk about their job.
- c. This can also be done at a regional, national or European level to create a sense of community on a larger scale. This connection can also increase expectations for working conditions and facilitate discussions on new techniques.

4. Creation of a representative group of front line care workers

- a. Involve group in regular meetings with management to give opinions on organizational decisions. This allows members to have their voices heard within the upper management of the organization. It shows that the management cares about their front line workers and is willing to take their advice and opinion into account for decision making, especially on matters that involves them directly.

5. Allow care givers to give input in their care plans. This could be in the development or the implementation of the plan.

Example: At a private residential care home with nursing, staff is provided with care plans but they decide the best way to carry out the tasks among them and the order in which tasks are completed. The manager reported 'this gives them a sense of responsibility' (eksogen, Skills for care, 2013)

Management Efforts

With small organizations, sometimes limited staff and budgets, it is often easy for employers in the social services sector to become bogged down by the daily grind. Sometimes this can mean losing time for the employees. In today's world, as mentioned, employees do expect time from management. The following suggestions help tackle that issue with steps that can be taken to improve working relationships with employees. Many of these suggestions have come from good practice literature within social services sector, such as the Care Sector Alliance Cumbria Good Practice Guide (2007).

1. Regular face time with employees

- a. Taking time to understand their working preferences (days, hours, etc.)

Note: This does not mean affording all staff members all of their preferences, because that will not be possible. However, when it is possible, an organization should try to accommodate their preferences. What is important is taking the time to understand when employees prefer to work, what types of cases they like, etc. This gives them the understanding that an employer pays attention to their needs and takes them into consideration.

Example: If in the organization there are employees with kids, perhaps their preferences are working at night so that they are able to stay home during the day and their partner takes care of kids at night. This means they save on child care costs and fill undesirable hours. If the time is not taken to understand these preferences, an organization can have multiple unhappy employees.

- 2. Provide clear expectations from the beginning about undesirable working hours so there are no surprises**
- 3. Providing advanced notice to changes in shifts**
- 4. Offering flexibility for family obligations**
 - a. A highly cited reason for leaving social services sector jobs is work/life balance and personal reasons (ekosgen, 2013)

Direct Incentives

- 1. Rewards for working for the organization for a set amount of time (e.g. offering more vacation time, monetary bonus, option of flexible working hours)**
- 2. Campaign targeted at improving the image of the social services sector**
- 3. Offering a signing bonus that requires the employee to remain for a set number of years.**