

## Leveraging Process Improvement to Attract and Retain Top Talent

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In a weak economy, with limited job openings and employees craving job security, many companies may have been tempted to neglect their retention programs and push retention to the bottom of the HR agenda. But companies that used the recession as their retention strategy may find themselves in trouble as the economy recovers and the demand for talent rebounds.

Human capital is any company's most important asset. After all, a loss of top talent usually translates into a loss of revenue, especially when experienced, client-facing employees that comprise top sales teams depart in search of greener pastures.

The question companies should be asking is: How can we retain our top talent when continued economic weakness prevents us from boosting compensation or exploring other financial incentives? For many companies, process is the answer.

SSA recently worked with a \$13B financial services and information brokerage firm that was having trouble with its sales order processing – which prevented members of the sales team from receiving their commission payments in a timely manner. Process improvement became a key retention initiative.

Prior to SSA's engagement, the company had created a 'validation department' in an attempt to speed up the sales process. The idea was to have this department take post-sale information from sales team members and use it to structure the contracts. When SSA examined the process, we found that the data exchange between these sales and validation was grossly inefficient. Excessive "back-and-forth" between sales team members and account specialists in the validation department was adding too much time to the process, but not enough value. As a result, contracts were taking more time to structure after a sale, which delayed the payment of commissions.

The goal of SSA's work was to improve the productivity and speed of these processes in the short term to limit employee turnover in the long term. Using our Strategic Process Management (SPM) approach, SSA worked with the validation department and the sales force to develop a future state with standardized processes for structuring contracts and a common template to improve the exchange of information between the sales team and account specialists. We began by mapping the key value streams of the process, collecting metrics from 52 process steps and interviewing employees. After collecting the information via the value streams, SSA analyzed the data with the client. In a collaborative effort with the sales team, account specialists and SSA consultants, we then developed an improved future state. While data collection and analysis was important, the engagement of key employees was critical to ensuring that key employees were in agreement about the best practices that would be implemented and the future vision that could be achieved.

Eliminating the inefficiencies in a sales process not only keeps a sales force happy and engaged, but also generates more revenue by eliminating non-value added time. Some of the specific benefits from this case study include:

- \$4.89 million Revenue Recognition and FTE benefits
- 16% improvement in Account Specialist Representative (ASR) efficiency –
  - 39 ASRs (including Managers) vs. 45 ASRs (no managers) are processing approximately the same volume of orders
- 20% reduction in process validation time
- >72% reduction in both total time with ASR and total queue time

Attracting and retaining top talent is an important challenge that every successful company must master. Oftentimes, the most dynamic companies discover retention strategies in overlooked areas – as the example above

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demonstrates. Eliminating inefficiencies at any level of an organization, whether client-facing or back-office, can relieve the daily frustrations of key employees and improve retention. More importantly, if employees can collaborate and engage in the elimination of these inefficiencies, a sense of ownership can drive employee satisfaction with the transformation process. Through process efficiency, organizations can become the best and most competitive athletes in the market so they can attract and retain what drives their businesses the most – people.