



How to Become a Talent Magnet

Wise leaders build engagement by becoming magnets for high-performing talent.

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Boring Presentation

Never before have organizations paid more attention to talent — keeping it, attracting it, developing it and engaging it.

Talent is no longer simply a numbers game. It's about survival. It's about winning market share and bringing on new investors, clients and big contracts. Companies depend on their top performers to innovate and differentiate themselves from their competitors. They're reliant on their employees to thrive.

Executives, line managers and the learning and development professionals who support them agree that engaging and retaining talent is a core business initiative. In fact, many enterprises have elevated talent retention to the top tier of objectives, on a par with generating revenue and managing costs.

In support, leaders constantly seek new ways to build everyday engagement — the brand of engagement that is natural, effective and sustainable. Wise leaders build engagement by taking a lesson from science. The magic and science of magnetism has many relatable applications for engagement and retention. Let's face it, most of us could be more magnetic — and most of us would like our bosses to do the same.

Magnetism is an extraordinary power that attracts or repels. It gets its name from Magnesia, Turkey, where more than 2,000 years ago the Greeks found rock that possessed mysterious powers. The rock, a form of iron ore called magnetite, could attract metals, making the rock and the metal stick together.

A magnet is a substance — usually a metal, such as iron or steel — that has been magnetized so that it will behave like magnetite. Any metal that can do this is called magnetic.

What's a Talent Magnet?

Magnetism can help leaders understand human reactions at work. That understanding is often the first step to increasing leadership effectiveness and employee engagement.

Managers can be talent magnets, and decide how much energy they devote to attracting and developing talent. While organizations have magnetic forces by virtue of their mission, vision and values, the manager must translate those forces into everyday action.

Managers can attract and hold talent. An organization as a whole, a business unit, function, team or person can be a talent magnet. Because managers have the most power and influence in the engagement and retention arena, we'll focus on them.

Managers decide how much energy they devote to attracting and developing talent and translate those forces into everyday action.

When leaders have strong magnetism, they feel it. So do others. Energy, morale, engagement and productivity are measurably high. Recruiting talent is easier because people want to work for talent magnets. Talent magnets get positive press. If leaders recognize and use their own magnetic powers, they can create more, achieve more and earn more.

But what if leaders aren't magnetic? Well, they're in trouble. Finding and keeping top talent makes or breaks a team, business unit and, ultimately, a company.

The good news: Even the most nonmagnetic leaders can create, increase and sustain magnetism.

Here are some examples of how magnetism works in talent retention:

- **Every magnet has a magnetic field around it.** Every talent magnet creates a culture that attracts and keeps talented people.
- **The stronger the magnet, the larger the magnetic field.** The more magnetic managers are, the more people they affect.
- **If you break a magnet in pieces, you'll produce new magnetic fields around each new piece.** Magnetic managers create more magnets by sharing their power and ability with others.
- **Metal objects that attach to magnets become magnetic, too.** Employees of talent magnets attract others, at least while they work for a magnetic manager.
- **Something that behaves like a magnet after it leaves the field of the inducing magnet is said to have residual magnetism.** When managers lose talent magnets to the competition, they lose a crucial competitive edge.
- **The attraction of two magnets toward one another depends on how close they are and how strong the magnetic force is within the magnet.** Talent magnets get to know their people well. They get close and stay close, learning all they can about their employees' motivations and desires.
- **If a magnet is suspended in air, it will always point in a north-south direction.** A compass always finds magnetic north. Magnetic managers create, share and lead by a strong vision.
- **One can create a magnet by giving it an electric charge or by putting a specific metal in the mix, like iron.** Talent magnets know when and how to boost engagement through learning and development. They take action when something employees want is missing.
- **One can demagnetize a magnet in many ways.** Managers can put people off by actions they take or fail to take.

Identifying the 'Sticking Features'

What makes an organization, team or leader magnetic? Decades of research confirm that most workers want fair pay and a good work environment. Beyond that, they want exciting, meaningful work, a chance to grow, and a good boss. These are sticking features that people have in common.

But this doesn't tell the whole story because everyone has a unique sticking features list. If leaders guess at what their talented people want, they'll often guess wrong. Instead, managers at all levels will do well to stop guessing and start conducting stay interviews with every one of their employees.

Stay interviews are conversations between managers and their employees that intend to tell people how much they're valued and to learn what will keep them engaged and on the team. Stay interviews prevent exit interviews.

Managers need to discover what people really want and need to bring their discretionary effort to work and to stay in the organization. As part of a stay interview, for instance, one manager might ask their employee: "Which part of your job do you wish you didn't have to do, and which part would you like to expand?"

That simple question can open up a conversation that leads to job enrichment and increased engagement.

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Create Magnetism

Once managers know which sticking features matter most to their employees, they're ready to create magnetism.

Apply an electrical charge. For some employees, the electrical charge comes from a career discussion, a new learning opportunity or a much-desired "thank you" from the boss. Talent magnets learn what kind of charge their people want.

Consider this hypothetical example: When Sergey's boss asked what he wanted to learn next year, he said, "I'd like to improve my negotiating skills." They began a three-step learning process. Here are the steps they followed and how it worked out for Sergey.

Step 1 – Conscious Observation: Sergey's boss selected someone who was exceptionally skilled at negotiating for Sergey to observe. Later, Sergey and his boss discussed what Sergey learned and would do differently.

Step 2 – Selected Participation: Sergey's boss allowed him to take a well-defined but limited role in a negotiation. The goal was to let Sergey practice without feeling overwhelmed. Afterwards, Sergey and his boss discussed what worked and what to improve.

Step 3 – Key Responsibility: Sergey's boss gave him primary responsibility for a project that required excellent negotiation skills. Sergey completed the entire negotiation with the vendor and was accountable for the outcome. His boss was present, of course, but would have stepped in only if Sergey requested his support. Afterward, his boss asked him what worked well and why.

It worked. One year later, Sergey is thrilled with his job and continues to develop mastery as a negotiator for his organization.

Put some metal in the mix. Some people want a deeper relationship with their boss, while others want more fun at work or more time away from work. True magnet managers will discover what's missing and partner with their employees to add those ingredients to the job.

Talent magnets are always curious about what's working and what's missing. They then collaborate with their employees to find the right formula for magnetism.

Increase Magnetism

Sometimes leaders have magnetism, but not often or powerful enough to attract, engage and keep the best people. The good news is magnets can get stronger.

Turn up the voltage. Some people would like more praise or encouragement. Others want to know their bosses care about them, their lives and their careers. Talent magnets should notice when employees' job enthusiasm appears flat. They can even use failure as a learning experience.

Get bigger magnets. Magnetic managers often connect themselves to other magnets, becoming more powerful themselves. They reach up and out to learn and give more to those who follow them. In the race to engage and retain talent, there is never a time to say, "I've done enough." There is always a way to improve the relationship or enrich the work.

Recharge. Talent magnets check in often with their talented employees. They want to know how the sticking features have changed. What do they want more of or less of from work? Listening is the most powerful tool in the talent magnet's toolkit.

Magnetism can make objects attract or repel each other. It's sad but true that actively disengaged or toxic bosses can drive talent out the door. Retention researchers agree that people seldom leave organizations; they leave managers.

Magnetic managers need to be vigilant and courageous. They regularly recharge themselves and whom they manage. They mentor, manage and ultimately remove demagnetizing forces from their teams.

Talent magnets are a powerful force for an organization. They attract others who can help them build and sustain engaged, highly productive workforces. They watch for and disempower demagnetizing forces.

The strongest leaders ask themselves how they might grow even stronger or know their people better. They ponder how they might increase the electrical charge help employees find missing ingredients or turn up the voltage.

The payoff for talent magnets and the organizations they lead is profound. It can make the difference between an organization being mediocre and it being hugely successful.

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