



Employee Retention

Dealers share ways they keep service technicians

Compiled by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

Following is a question submitted by a dealer member as part of BTA's Dealers Helping Dealers resource and many of the answers received. Some answers have been lightly edited for length and clarity. These answers and others can be found in the members-only section of the BTA website. Visit www.bta.org/DealersHelpingDealers. You will need your username and password to access this member resource.



How do I keep technicians? As an employee of 33 years, I have a hard time understanding the upcoming generation. The grass always looks greener on the other side and techs leave after a year or so despite pay increases and other incentives. Most of the time, they get some IT experience working here and poof, they're gone. We have two groups within the service department — printer techs and IT techs. Both have had more turnover in the last five years than ever before.

I would also like to know: Can an entry-level employee afford housing in your area? One would think that an employee would take pay increases, stay for advancements, settle into a career and eventually move into a management position, but this just doesn't seem to happen anymore. We hire, train, listen to their reasoning for leaving, hire, train and repeat.

I seem to remember a BTA article about this that I read thoroughly, but came away from it saying to myself, "I do most of the same things, but they aren't working for me." Any help would be appreciated.

"I think having a good culture will help keep people. We have a lot of tenure in our service tech department. We are currently looking to partner with local colleges and technical schools to try and create a path to get new recruits."

*Frank Betancourt, sales manager
Seminole Office Solutions, Longwood, Florida*

"Housing is too expensive in our area for entry-level employees. Our service department has had some turnover, but most of it has been good turnover. When we had a technician leave

for a higher-paying position, he asked to return twice after his departure. We do pay more than we ever have in the past."

*Dan Detrick, vice president
CopyLady Inc., Fort Myers, Florida*

"The prices of housing, along with other living expenses, have risen faster than the pay rate. This is a function of Washington, D.C. Like it or not, this divide has grown in the last few years. I am not making a political statement, but it is an undeniable truth. As for hanging on to folks, there will likely not be management paths for many of your service techs. It is an issue and with the recent law changes about noncompetes, I am afraid that it will become even more common. It is much easier to say than to do, but you have to build a bench — have more techs than you need right now. That does two things: It better allows for growth and when someone does depart abruptly, it doesn't leave you with a big worker deficit."

*John Eckstrom, president
Carolina Business Equipment, Columbia, South Carolina*

"Welcome to 2024. We are paying new-hire techs with no experience the same as techs who have 20-plus years of experience. We have focused our hiring on more experienced techs to the extent possible in an effort to reduce turnover. In our business, experienced techs tend to stay with our company longer. We do realize we need some new blood, but have not found anyone with the work ethic and willingness to learn our industry. Most seem like they are almost afraid of the concept of being in the field versus in the office. Strange times."

*Mike DelBorrello, president
Cyan Sky Copier Technologies, Schnecksville, Pennsylvania*

"It seems there has been a shift in priorities from experienced techs to entry-level hires, where the latter group values flexibility over stability and mobility over growth."

*Mark Van Den Hoek, owner
The Office Advantage, Mitchell, South Dakota*

"There are a lot of companies vying for the same talent pool. Trying to hire new grads or 'just-out-of-high-school' candidates is tough when manufacturing and general labor are offering \$22 to \$25 per hour starting wages. This, in

combination with the ever-rising prices of everything, creates an environment where hiring someone to ‘grow with your dealership’ is more than difficult now. Providing uniforms, tools, consistent training, a phone, a laptop and a company car has helped, but it is still very tough to find talent who will show up to an interview, present themselves well in front of customers and stick with a skill long enough to become an expert at it. The average price for a house in our rural area is approaching \$400,000 and that is just not sustainable or reachable for a single-income family. Taking on a \$2,000 or more mortgage per month is a huge hurdle. And rent is not much better at \$1,200 to \$1,500 per month, on average.”

*Brian Bence, executive director of sales
Shenandoah Valley Office Equipment (SVOE), Verona, Virginia*

“I try to be fair with their wages, but give them as much time off as I can. I think techs new to the industry are, frankly, more interested in work-life balance than overall wages. So, I value their time more. Yes, I may pay mid-level, but I give way more flexibility with the time they are given off. Any chance I can give them a ‘free day,’ I do it.”

*Kent McBride, president
PBP Tech, Sophia, West Virginia*

“We have similar problems across the board with entry-level employees. We make an effort to stay current on mergers and acquisitions in our region. Often, we find that employees who have been laid off or who are dissatisfied in the merged environment make great hires for our independent dealership.”

*Tim Renegar, president
Kelly Office Solutions, Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

“My crew followed me from another dealership. We’ve kept this crew together by treating them right and keeping up with their pay. New hires need to be screened; try to keep the rotten apples out of your barrel.”

*Dan Castaneda, general manager
International Copy Machine Center, El Paso, Texas*

“Finding and keeping service technicians is more difficult than ever. Yes, entry-level technicians can afford housing in our market. In the last two years, we have increased our starting salary approximately 15% — sometimes more depending on the candidate. Employee retention (it seems) takes more commitment and energy than finding qualified candidates. There is no magic bullet or ‘easy button.’ Our current generation of leadership doesn’t have the luxury of the previous ‘do-it-because-it’s-your-job’ generation. I would bet that the

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generation before ours felt the same way. There are some values that are tried and true to leadership: be honest, open and direct. Quality candidates can turn into quality employees if we stick to these core values.”

*Dave Schaefflein, director of service
Proven IT, Tinley Park, Illinois*

“We’ve had the same issue. We’re paying 20% more for starting positions and have had to increase everyone’s pay. Try

to keep them motivated with a career path. We’ve recently found some good, entry-level technicians who seem to have the right character. We have also been getting Xerox techs, but they are expensive.”

*Nick Lioce, president
The Lioce Group, Huntsville, Alabama*

“Service technicians have felt like a commodity in this industry for a very long time. They are held accountable to the numbers, but never feel truly listened to. Offerings such as PIVOT and BEI have allowed dealerships to put a dollar value to the numbers, resulting in increased income for the service department.

“In addition, techs want you to know that you have real issues in the field and they want to know those issues will be taken seriously when they arise. Give the technicians a consistent platform and weekly meeting to ensure their needs are met.

“Techs may leave for a higher wage, but a higher wage does not give them the comfort and security that a well-run department does. Know your numbers, hold your techs accountable to the numbers and bonus them when they do. The longer they stay, the more valuable they become and the more increases and promotions they will see in their futures.”

*Brandon Cousins, president
Kraft Business Systems, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

“I think the time issue is the major problem. Everyone wants flex time and the new worker does not like to be tied down to a set program and wants flexibility.”

*Dale Rachal, CFO
ABM Office Solutions, Alexandria, Louisiana*

“We have similar challenges with the Amazon warehouses popping up in our area and how they pay. We do have certain incentives that help, including commissions that are paid out if a tech finds a lead in the field.”

*Adam Volpe, vice president of sales
Altek Business Systems, Telford, Pennsylvania ■
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