



FULLY COMMITTED?

Simon Alderson explains the importance of effective staff retention strategies in security firms

From construction sites to stadiums, security is critical to keeping businesses and people safe. Retaining competent individuals in the security profession, on the other hand, can be a considerable difficulty. Despite an increasing need for security services in the post-pandemic era, some businesses are having difficulty recruiting and retaining security employees.

Several factors contribute to these challenges, including low pay, licensing requirements, unsociable work hours, a lack of flexibility, over capacity in certain areas, fewer local job seekers as a result of Brexit, high levels of workplace violence and limited career pathways in many parts of the industry. This is exacerbated by the hard nature of the

job, rivalry from other firms and restricted prospects for advancement. Tackling these barriers is critical to attracting and maintaining skilled employees in the security business, and that security organisations may need to break with tradition in order to do so.

As of July 2023, it was predicted that over 480,000 people worked in the UK security sector, up from approximately 420,000 in January 2021, representing a 60,000 rise. The demand for security services has never been greater, but maintaining good employees remains a major concern. Security officer turnover is high throughout the business, making retention a significant concern.

Low pay is just one of the many reasons why retaining employees might be difficult. The cost of admission into the

Employers that develop a feeling of purpose and meaning in their job will boost retention in a competitive market

security guarding industry is a significant barrier before additional obstacles emerge. The SIA licence cost was restored to its former level in 2020, and when adjusted for inflation, it is now less expensive in real terms than it was in 2004. However, the expenditures of connected training, such as the licence-linked training course and first aid training, have increased the financial burden on prospective security officers. In recent years, the number of active security guarding licences and licence applications has fallen.

Security guarding businesses must also pay for recruitment. Security firms report rising costs associated with the recruitment and deployment of security guards on an annual basis, including vetting, uniform charges, training, insurance premiums and technological improvements, all of which make recruiting expensive.

Alternative job opportunities are perceived to offer higher pay rates, better benefits, sociable hours, work-life balance and career advancement, often drawing potential security guards away from the industry.

A snapshot poll conducted in 2022 showed that pay rates for security personnel typically coincide with the National Living Wage, the Government's minimum wage for those over the age of 23, with some increase compared with previous years. The increased pay rates may be attributed to security guards' expanding responsibilities, which include facility management, cleaning, crowd management and customer service chores. This makes the job more appealing. However, true Living Wage Recognised Service Providers, such as First Response Group, have found retention benefits by paying over the minimum necessary wage rates and opting to pay the higher voluntary real Living Wage, the only wage rate independently established based on the real cost of living. Across the industry, the minimum wage or National Living Wage offered by many security services is causing substantial personnel turnover and retention issues. Furthermore, security guards often work 12-hour shifts, and some perceive the job as a temporary source of money while they pursue other opportunities.

To address the issues of recruiting and retention in the security guarding industry, security businesses must consider three critical strategies. Increasing pay levels to retain experienced employees, developing clear career routes within the business, improving public opinion of security personnel, allowing flexible working hours and shifts to recruit a diverse workforce, and improving accessibility are all examples of these initiatives.

When it comes to the working environment and culture of a company, encouraging happiness in the workplace is a vital component that we strive for. A favourable work environment, as well as a culture that promotes teamwork, open communication and mutual respect, are critical in retaining employees. Encouragement of employee participation in decision-making processes, as well as recognition of their achievements, can increase morale and promote a sense of belonging. Furthermore, encouraging work-life balance, providing comfortable working circumstances, and giving competitive remuneration packages are critical in keeping employees loyal, long-term engagement, and career desire.

Security companies should also invest in the professional development of their employees. Training programmes, workshops and certifications not only improve employees' technical competence and skills, but also indicate the company's dedication to their personal growth and success. Giving staff options for advancement within the company,

such as promotions or lateral movements, ensures that they perceive a clear path for career development. Security companies may build loyalty and prevent worker turnover by investing in their employees' growth.

Offering competitive pay and benefits is critical in cultivating a committed, long-term minded team. To stay attractive to employees, security businesses must routinely assess and benchmark their compensation against industry standards. Paying more than the National Living Wage and promoting schemes such as the real Living Wage in a competitive market, can be a crucial distinction that helps to prevent personnel turnover. Furthermore, offering comprehensive benefit packages that include health insurance, retirement plans and paid time off can dramatically improve employee satisfaction. Recognising exceptional performance via cash incentives, bonuses or profit-sharing plans increases the importance of employees.

CAREER PROGRESSION DEMANDS ONGOING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYEES

Recognising and thanking employees for their accomplishments and devotion is all too frequently ignored or given lip service. Security firms with innovation and insight can implement formal recognition schemes that recognise great performance, lengthy service and employee contributions. This can include public recognition, monetary prizes, certifications or professional development opportunities. Such acknowledgment promotes a sense of pride, increases motivation and encourages people to remain dedicated to the firm.

Maintaining open lines of communication is also essential for increasing employee retention. Establishing regular feedback channels, such as performance assessments and employee surveys, enables management to address complaints, provide constructive feedback and gain a better understanding of their employees' needs and expectations. Encouragement of employee input and active participation in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and promotes job satisfaction. From our perspective, we have frequent check-in and wellbeing sessions with our people (from the bottom to the top of the organisation), which allows us to troubleshoot problems early on and keep staff happy, especially when they work on site, as most security officers do, with limited day-to-day contact with head office.

Employers in our industry and others that develop a feeling of purpose and meaning in their job will boost retention in a competitive market. The significance of their contributions is reinforced by emphasising the importance of their jobs in protecting persons and property. Meanwhile, connecting employees to the firm's vision and values develops pride and loyalty, making them more inclined to stay with the company!

Employee wellness activities are another consideration. Wellness activities such as fitness programmes, stress management courses and access to counselling services can improve their overall quality of life and job satisfaction. It also demonstrates that the organisation is concerned. Because security is a difficult job, putting these measures in place can help keep staff happy and motivated.

Equipping the workforce with the right tools to do the job effectively is another area of importance to ensure wellbeing. Providing security professionals with cutting-edge technology and tools also boosts their productivity and effectiveness on the job. Modern security technology not only makes their job easier, but it also reflects the organisation's dedication to being at the forefront of security practises. Investing in people and equipment to make their tasks simpler is part of good security. Body cameras, for example, can assist in retaining a record of contacts with the public and so not only better assure good customer service but also keep a record of incidents for subsequent review and evaluation, such as in complaints procedures.

MAINTAINING OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION IS VITAL FOR INCREASING EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Money is important. Retaining security personnel is critical for ensuring a steady and competent security team. Employers can create an environment where security officers feel valued and motivated to stay by offering competitive compensation and benefits, providing professional development opportunities, fostering a supportive work environment, recognising their efforts, offering clear career advancement paths, promoting employee wellness, modernising technology and emphasising the organisation's purpose. Organisations can use these tactics to ensure that their security team remains committed to protecting lives and assets, thereby improving overall safety and security for everyone involved.

A well-defined career path gives security employees a sense of purpose and direction within the organisation. They are more engaged and driven in their current responsibilities when they understand the actions required to advance in their professions. Knowing that their efforts

are helping them advance fosters a sense of ownership and dedication to their responsibilities. A well-defined career advancement plan provides security officers with a measurable goal to strive for. It inspires people to go above and beyond their obligations because they know their efforts will be recognised and rewarded. This motivation improves not only individual officers, but also the organisation's overall security provision.

A clear career progression path demands ongoing skill development and training for security employees. Organisations engage in their staff by providing workshops, certificates and professional development opportunities. As security officers gain new skills and expertise, they become more capable of dealing with a wide range of difficulties, making them more valuable assets to the organisation.

One of the most significant benefits of defined career growth paths is lower turnover rates. When security professionals can see their future within the organisation, they are less likely to look for other alternatives. Employers benefit from lower turnover rates since acquiring and training new employees can be costly and time-consuming, as previously noted.

A career growth route encourages security officers to be loyal and committed. Officers feel respected and appreciated knowing that the organisation invests in their professional development and recognises their potential. This emotional attachment to the organisation improves their dedication, resulting in higher work satisfaction and retention rates.

Furthermore, pursuing a career rather than a job develops an environment of excellence inside the organisation. Security officers are encouraged to give their all in order to reach professional milestones and develop. This desire for excellence pervades the team, resulting in a positive and high-performing work atmosphere. Organisations can identify prospective future leaders within the security team by establishing clear career advancement paths. When there is a pool of qualified and experienced officers ready to take on greater responsibilities, succession planning becomes more successful. Internal promotions also increase morale by showing officers that their efforts might lead to prospects for advancement within the organisation ●

Simon Alderson – CEO of First Response Group – has over 20 years' leadership experience in the security industry, with a track record of transforming organisations and driving business growth.

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