

## How To Keep Your Sales Superstars

I've spent a lot of time discussing how to attract new sellers, but not as much on how to retain your more experienced and productive sellers. It's such a crucial topic that it needs a column of its own.

As radio stations struggle to find new people to sell on-air or others who can build digital business, more tenured sellers can be overlooked. And because many clusters have eliminated layers of management, executives are spread so thin that they don't give needed attention to their most valuable people.

When assessing your staff's needs, remember that the number one requested "benefit" that sellers ask for is **recognition**. Many sellers share with me that they only hear the negative from their managers, which doesn't make for a very happy or, ultimately, productive workplace.

### PAY UP

I have often addressed the compensation issue for new hires, but don't forget about those who have been loyal and productive and may now be starting to experience hard times. One senior seller expressed concern to her management and heard in response, "Why are you worried? You made a ton of money last year!"

The fact is, this person is paid on 100 commission, and she *earns* what she's paid. Managers usually have a salary with an override but can count on a paycheck, while those on 100 percent commission cannot. An offer to increase a draw isn't the answer, as it only gets the seller in debt and doesn't address the larger issue.


Here are a few ideas to consider for keeping your top producers happy:

- Consider a compensation plan that includes a base salary with a lower commission rate, or a bonus if goals are met. Hire fewer, more productive people.
- Offer more flexibility. If sellers can work from a virtual office part of the time, they can save on gas, child care, dry cleaning, parking, food, coffee, etc. This can add up to major savings while allowing sellers to dedicate some of the hours they'd spent commuting to working.
- Team a senior person with a rookie or a sales assistant. The senior seller will be more productive with the added support, while the new person will learn the ropes.
- Accept trades that can help sellers' bottom line, like gas, parking, and groceries to help ease the financial strain they are feeling.



- Listen to their needs and concerns. These employees are important in helping make your budget and should be treated as the key players they are and have been. Understand what is upsetting them, have an open mind, and work together to create solutions that are win-win.
- Take the time to appreciate their efforts. Put some flowers on a seller's desk on a dreary day, send them out for a massage, or give them a certificate for a resort or hotel — and include dining dollars.
- Challenge senior producers to learn the digital sell and NTR, but keep them on key accounts so they feel trusted and respected.

As hard as it is to find junior sellers, the cost to a station when a senior person leaves is huge. Think about their relationships, their contacts, their knowledge. A guarantee of income would be needed to bring in someone new at that level. Why not be more proactive and take care of these valuable people before they decide to leave? Let them know you understand the situation and want them on your team.

These may not be approaches that many stations or sales managers can take on their own, since the ideas must first be sold to corporate. Smaller companies that have the advantage of making decisions and implementing new plans more quickly can benefit from adopting a more employee-friendly plan. It will pay off. 



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