

# Deconstructing Turnover

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*Why it Happens, What it Costs, and What You Can Do to Protect Your Organization*



**I**magine there weren't enough police officers, firefighters, EMTs or nurses to assist us in our time of need.

What if 911 didn't exist? Would our calls go unanswered? How would we survive?

Although those questions may seem like the plot to a blockbuster movie, the truth is, every year, we inch closer to this scenario becoming a reality.

**If you think it's impossible, think again.**

## The Hard Truth

- » The number of volunteers and paid firefighters has declined by 12% since 1984.<sup>[1]</sup>
- » In a nationwide survey of EMS directors, 55% of respondents reported problems retaining EMT's and paramedics. <sup>[2]</sup>
- » According to Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, "The country is facing a looming crisis in the hiring of police officers."<sup>[3]</sup>
- » In 2009, the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International calculated a 19% turnover rate for emergency communication centers in the U.S.<sup>[4]</sup>
- » The Health Resources and Services Administration projects that more than 1 million registered nurses will reach retirement age within the next 10 to 15 years.<sup>[5]</sup>

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"The fact is that no algorithm or mathematical metric can ever replace the human element  
of an educated, engaged, compassionate servant leader." — Lt. Jerry D. Miller (ret)  
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A healthy economy and booming job market are becoming catalysts for the perfect storm. Furthermore, elements such as increasing demand for job satisfaction, improved work-life balance, and healthier work environments, are blazing a trail for emboldened employees to vacate their position for better offers, career changes, and healthier work environments.

Despite preparations and built-in contingencies for departures due to illness, injury, or age-related retirement, organizations are facing a rising wave of elective resignations. We call this voluntary turnover.

For years, government agencies and public service organizations believed themselves immune from such ailments as voluntary turnover and insufficient candidate pools. Yet recent shifts in social and economic climates have left these historically strong industries battling to retain and recruit the top talent.

What does this mean for the future of public service organizations?

Simply put, if we expect to overcome these challenges, we must re-examine our recruitment and retention practices. Guaranteed pension and attractive benefits are no longer enough to keep our organizations healthy and our people engaged.

We must offer our employees the same motivational drivers and support levels that they would receive in the private sector. While leadership may question the viability and cost of such measures, it all equates to simple math. Which costs more—funding the problem or funding the solution?

In this report we'll: uncover the true cost of losing an employee; examine retention strategies; and discuss how performance management tools are bridging the gap between employment and empowerment.

## The Coming Storm

We've all heard the quote "Winners never quit, and quitters never win," but what if they do?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in December of 2018, 3.5 million workers challenged Vince Lombardi's iconic statement by turning in their papers and walking out the door. Even more surprising, federal government separations increased by 8,000.<sup>[6]</sup> And in that same year, a national survey conducted by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence revealed 34% of survey participants reported experiencing yearly spikes in the number of quits and a growing concern over an inability to fill law enforcement, healthcare, fire and emergency service positions.<sup>[7]</sup>

Regardless of industry, the fact remains that voluntary turnover is depleting organizational resources nationwide. In fact, the national quit rate has increased every year since 2010.<sup>[8]</sup> While there are indeed variables affecting this shift, the numbers don't lie. It's no longer a secret. American workers are searching for more, and no industry is immune.

How does voluntary turnover affect your organization? Let's assess the costs.

National studies estimate the average cost of replacing one employee is equivalent to 33% of their annual salary.<sup>[9]</sup> That means losing a \$45,000 a year employee drains an organization approximately \$14,850.00 per incident. And while those numbers may not seem earth-shattering, keep in mind turnover often occurs in waves.<sup>[10]</sup>

For example, if your organization experiences a wave of resignations, the financial implications can reach far beyond original estimates. Using the above calculation, if one employee resigns, one is promoted, and two more retire in the same year, you can expect to lay out an extra \$59,400.00 in replacement costs alone.

Furthermore, those projects don't include separation packages, nor do they account for incalculable losses such as wisdom, productivity, and increased tension brought on by swelling stress levels and sinking morale. In any

industry, those losses would amount to significant hardships, but in public service, the ramifications could prove devastating.

Before we can mitigate the issue and stop the slow leaks from blowing a hole through your organizational structure, we must examine the problem in-depth.

Let's start with the million-dollar question: **What's driving the spike? The answer: a mixture of external and internal elements.**



## External Forces Impacting Turnover

Outside factors such as: a remarkably low unemployment rate; a staggering surge of job openings; a rapidly aging workforce, and the perennial challenges of keeping up with the private sector are the tip of the spear.

In 2018, the U.S. unemployment rate plummeted to an astonishing low of 3.9%. In contrast, the number of available positions skyrocketed to 7.3 million.<sup>[11]</sup> Meanwhile, the median age of the American worker hovers at 42.5 years old.<sup>[12]</sup> As baby-boomers retire and mid-tier employees move-up to senior leadership roles, a flood of vacant positions threaten to drown organizations already operating below ideal staffing levels. Experts at Deloitte research predict, that because public service has a history of attracting people interested in early retirement, sudden losses of talent and institutional knowledge will impact this industry harder than most.<sup>[13]</sup>

While candidate lists may be overflowing with prospective recruits, many organizations face bureaucratic barricades and budgetary woes when attempting to fill openings. Not only is gaining the necessary approvals and funding a process within itself, but strict onboarding practices and stringent eligibility requirements frequently slash the number of qualified applicants to less than half.

Further exacerbating the situation, government employment isn't what it used to be. Today, Dwindling benefits and restructured pension plans pale in comparison to those offered just 15 years ago.<sup>[14]</sup>

For example, in 2004, it was common for employment contracts to offset private sector wages with fully funded health benefits, longevity bonuses, generous pension plans, and unwavering job protection. These perks have all but disappeared, being replaced instead by fine print, high contribution levels, and oppressively low retirement compensation.

Logic aside, these issues are rarely the extreme drivers behind an employee's decision to leave. Recent surveys suggest money, demographics, and compensation aren't the real trigger-points.<sup>[15]</sup> In many cases, the problem stems closer to home.

## Internal Conflicts Affecting Retention

Public service careers are demanding enough without the added stress of organizational pressures. Let's be realistic, no one enters public service for fame and fortune. They strive to be part of something bigger; a chance to represent the greater good; to help the helpless and bring comfort to those who have lost hope.

That being said, if the mission hasn't changed, where's the disconnect?

The answer could lie with internal practices.

Every day, discontent and disparity erode enthusiasm in the workplace. Leading research firm, Gallup Inc, reports, 52% of Americans feel unhappy at work, and 70% of U.S workers are reportedly disengaged.<sup>[16]</sup>

Moreover, countless other statistics indicate a direct relationship between an organization's workplace culture and its annual rate of voluntary turnover.<sup>[17]</sup>

According to trends, some of the top reasons employees leave is because of:

- » **Poor leadership**
- » **Lack of recognition**
- » **Limited growth opportunities**
- » **Dysfunctional workplace cultures**

To give you a better understanding, we'll go through each issue separately.

### Poor Leadership:

Too often leaders think they are doing an exceptional job, when in fact their subordinates state otherwise. As one eye-opening study revealed, when it comes to gauging leadership effectiveness, opinions are all over the board.

In this survey of 2,000 U.S. employees, researchers discovered several discrepancies among participants. Most notably among the findings: 71% of managers believe they know how to motivate their teams, while only 44% of employee-level participants agree with that statement. What's even more disturbing is the fact that less than half of the managers surveyed admit to receiving any formal leadership training.<sup>[18]</sup>

Where do these findings leave your organization? The short answer: caught in a paradox. Should you blame the employees, the supervisor, or the system?

Whatever your thoughts, it's no secret leadership starts at the top. Even with the proper guidance, leaders face innumerable challenges when tasked with supervisory duties. Likewise, without a clear set of expectations or guidelines, employees are robbed of the potential to understand their roles or fully embrace their responsibilities. Both instances are prime accelerants for internal conflict.

The takeaway? If you're not educating your supervisors, not only are you fueling the problem, you're sending mixed messages to your employees. Sooner or later, high-performers will realize there's little correlation between title and merit.

### Lack of Recognition:

In order to maintain and increase productivity, all employees must receive regular on-going feedback. Certainly, low performing employees should not be ignored. However, if we are to create and maintain high-performance employees and a high-performance organization, we cannot fail to recognize the good performers.<sup>[19]</sup> Research studies have consistently found that humans seek validation and appreciation.<sup>[20]</sup> This illustrates the strong emotional connection between our achievements and our sense of self-worth.

Think about it. In our personal lives when we feel valued and respected, we hold ourselves to higher standards and put forth our best effort living up to this image. It's no different at work. Those who understand the significance of their contributions take pride in their roles and never settle for "good enough". Instead, they think outside the box and go the extra mile without question. Given the proper motivation, most employees are eager to stay productive and remain in good standing.

By comparison, the absence of positive feedback stifles productivity and personal pride. Employees want their leaders to recognize outstanding efforts, and voice appreciation for above-and-beyond contributions. If there's little incentive for personnel to do more than show up and be counted, eventually, **people will clock-in but tune-out.**

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**“A recent survey showed that supervisors believe that 89 percent of employees leave because of pay. The actual number of employees who leave for a higher salary is 12 percent. Work is not about pay. People need a paycheck, but they do not put their passion into work because of money.” —Paul Zak**  
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### Limited Growth Opportunities:

According to leadership expert, John C. Maxwell, "Growth is the great separator between those who succeed and those who do not."

What do we mean by growth? More importantly, how can we measure it?

For some, growth represents upward-mobility and clear career paths. For others, the term takes on a deeper, more personal meaning. For this paper, we'll separate growth into two buckets: career and personal.

Career growth signifies our processes, our goals and the rate at which we expect to climb up the organizational ladder. Career growth is measurable by our successes, our failures, and the time and skill level needed to implement specific tasks or objectives. For instance, if an employee aspires to achieve certain credentials, how quickly was he or she able to learn, internalize and master the steps needed to attain that level of certification?

On the other hand, personal growth is trickier to calculate because it's unique to the individual, and not widely discussed. With personal growth, it's about the journey, not the destination. Personal growth has less to do with rational projections and more to do with self-fulfillment. Our purpose, our roles, and how closely we align our values with our organization's mission are all examples of personal growth areas.

No matter which way you define growth—career or personal—development is vital to engagement and job satisfaction. If we feel lost, confused and unfulfilled by our daily activities, we will seek ways to numb or shed those voids.

### Dysfunctional Work Environment:

Did you know that workplace stress is estimated to be the fifth leading cause of death in the United States? <sup>[21]</sup>

A recent study found that "approximately 40% of all workers today feel overworked, pressured and squeezed to the point of anxiety, depression, and disease, and 63% of Americans report they are not coping effectively with stress."<sup>[22]</sup>

Whether we admit it or not, our workplace culture dramatically impacts our lives. Based on an average 40-hour work week, Americans spend the equivalent of 2,080 hours or 87 days per year at their place of employment. With that in mind, over the course of 30 years, you can expect to spend 62,400 hours or just north of 7 years shackled to your job.

Seriously, would you want to spend seven years in a place that makes you feel alienated, stressed and miserable? Probably not.

Loving what you do but hating where you work is a constant power struggle. It drains you and often leaves you questioning whether the reward outweighs the sacrifice.

With that in mind, it's easy to see why people quit organizations that forego leadership training, ignore morale, breed negativity, and overlook the importance of ownership and accountability. As the number of available positions increases and the demand for skilled personnel grows, now more than ever, it's easier for stressed employees to find new opportunities in healthier work environments.

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**N**ow that we've uncovered some of the driving factors behind voluntary turnover let's examine how these occurrences impact your organization.

## Calculating the Cost of Voluntary Turnover

We can surmise two facts from our earlier assessment:

1. Voluntary turnover is largely preventable
2. Losing an employee is expensive.

Think about the last time someone separated from your organization.

- » **How did you react?**
- » **What changed after they left?**
- » **Did anyone work longer hours or take on extra responsibilities to fill the gaps?**
- » **How long did it take to find and hire a replacement?**
- » **How long did it take for the new hire to learn, adjust, and consistently perform?**

Have you ever wondered how much this evolution costs your organization? Depending on your role, that last question may or may not have crossed your mind, but rest assured, budget affects everyone. Take a look at the numbers.

### Assessing Goodbye

When someone leaves an organization, they must file paperwork, return property and in many cases submit to exit interviews. Not only do these administrative processes take time, but they require interaction with others on the payroll. When you factor in the salary of each employee involved in the process and multiply those calculations by the number of occurrences, **costs add up quickly.**

But wait, that's only the beginning. As opposed to many private sector corporations, almost all public service organizations issue equipment and clothing allowances to their employees. Whether it's turnout gear, rescue tools, tactical equipment or uniforms, you must consider the price of replacing, repairing and reissuing these items.

Now, think about the irrecoverable losses: organizational wisdom, training, and real-world experience. Public service is an evolutionary industry. Organizations invest countless hours and devote significant portions of their budgets to develop and continually educate their personnel. Besides the mandated certification classes, it's necessary for members to attend specialized training programs and industry conferences. And while these events greatly benefit both the employee and the organization, they are not free. Once your employee leaves, their knowledge and your investment are gone forever.

## Vying for Talent

Regardless of industry, service-driven organizations are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to recruiting top talent. Unlike profit-driven corporations, service organizations rarely base their compensation packages on a prospective hire's past performance or earnings potential. Instead, wages and benefits are pre-determined by job title, department, and longevity. And although money isn't a prime motivator in service-oriented career fields, mounting competition for skilled employees is at an all-time high. Organizations offering lower than average compensation rates will find it difficult to attract candidates with extensive experience or top-tier credentials.

No matter what sector your organization belongs to—private or public—recruitment and screening often equate to a long and frustrating process. Though the initial steps may differ, both sectors face challenges when it comes to the hiring process.



### Private Sector Recruitment

Private healthcare organizations may rely on outside staffing agencies to post vacancy notices, canvas recruiting platforms, pre-screen candidates, and conduct initial interviews. While outsourcing these activities saves time, it results in an added expense. The American Organization of Nurse Executives reports that hospitals spend an average of \$10,000 in recruiting costs, for every vacant nursing position they fill.<sup>[23]</sup>

Additionally, many staffing agencies do not possess the first-hand knowledge to address job-specific questions or concerns. As candidates progress closer to the hiring stage, it will become necessary for organizational representatives to involve themselves in the process.

In essence, what starts as a way to streamline the hiring process often transforms into an expensive and complicated game of back and forth between the agency, the candidate and the hiring organization. Even after securing a new hire, many organizations report that the onboarding process takes longer than expected and fails to provide a successful resolution to their staffing issues.

### Public Sector Recruitment

Contrary to popular belief, public sector recruitment comes with its own set of obstacles:

Securing the funds and support to add or replace an employee is never an easy task. Besides acquiring definitive proof of need, public service agencies must cut through miles of bureaucracy and red-tape to appease governing agencies and ensure community buy-in before they can even start the hiring process.

Once funding is in place, the search begins. If the vacancy is a civil service position, there may already be a list of prequalified candidates who have taken and passed an aptitude exam. However, standardized tests are only an indication of interest and offer little proof of actual ability. Canvassing and screening these applicants can take months.

After identifying a potential candidate, organizations will still need to conduct job-specific oral evaluations, background investigations, psychological testing, and physical exams. These activities tack more time onto the process and usually result in a high-elimination rate.

Not surprising, the average hiring time for public sector employees ranges between 2-6 months. Keep in mind; those estimates don't include additional training or certification times. Organizations filling vacancies in law enforcement and emergency services can expect to spend another 6-12 weeks getting their probationary recruits up to speed and ready to serve the community.

## Examining the Effects of Voluntary Turnover

Voluntary turnover doesn't affect just *anyone*; it affects *everyone*. From up-line supervisors to personnel on the street, when a colleague leaves, their actions can send tidal waves crashing through your organization.

No matter how well you prepare, losing a highly-skilled mentor, co-worker or leader, directly impacts your organization, your remaining staff members, and even your community.

When we lose our best employees, it can set off a chain of events including:

- » **Lower morale**
- » **Higher workloads**
- » **Increased negativity and stress**
- » **Decreased productivity**
- » **Loss of experiential wisdom and invaluable mentorship skills**
- » **Further resignations**

**Keep in mind: Every loss creates a ripple. Every ripple creates a wave.**

Replacing an employee with advanced skills or instructional abilities is time-consuming and expensive. In addition to paying for duplicate training, finding a successor with the right combination of knowledge and experience can take months or even years. In that time, others will be expected to step-up and augment their already monumental to-do list.

Left unchecked, these conditions create unhealthy cultures and task employees with the weight of balancing mission-critical functions and managing organization-wide discontent. In the wake of losing an employee, organizations must do everything in their power to inspire trust and keep their best employees motivated and focused on the mission.

How do we do that? Reverse-engineering.

Let's address what is and isn't working in the world of retention practices.

### Redefining Retention Strategies

Bracing for the future requires more than short-term solutions. Organizations must revisit their retention strategies and engage in long-term practices that inspire loyalty and trust.

While some progress is better than none financial incentives, enhanced benefits, and temporary organizational restructuring are little more than band-aids. These concessions address an immediate need but do nothing to prevent old problems from resurfacing.

Rather than focusing all our energy on efforts that require multiple approvals, we can take steps to fix the underlying problems that contribute to disengagement and voluntary turnover. Beginning from the bottom up, we must build stronger foundations that foster exceptional leadership and support employee growth.



### Constructing a Strong Foundation for Success

Imagine your organization is a house. Your leaders are your foundation, your people are the walls, and your processes are the roof that keeps your community functioning safely inside.

If one section isn't built properly or weakens over time—even a small storm can cause the entire house to crumble.

Every piece is dependent on the other's success.

If your foundation isn't strong, your walls won't hold and if your walls won't hold there's nothing to keep the roof from caving in and harming the inhabitants.

If you want to mitigate voluntary turnover and reinforce success: **start by fortifying your foundation.**

## Expanding on the concept of reinforcement, here are five strategies for boosting retention

### #1: Bolster Leadership

Too often organizations rely solely on seniority to fill supervisory roles. In turn, those new leaders never receive the training and development coaching needed to succeed in their position. As a result, they employ the same habits and practices as their predecessors without reflecting on ways to improve.

Leadership is more than the sum of your accomplishments. It's not about the color of your shirt, the stripes on your uniform, or how many letters appear after your name. It's about showing up with a purpose and inspiring others to stand alongside you rather than behind you.

Leadership fuels your people. It guides them with a firm hand and a gentle push. Good leaders tell people what to do, but great leaders show them how to do it. If leaders don't recognize excellence, reward creativity and offer constructive feedback, people have no way to gauge their performance and little incentive to give their all.

Supervisors set a precedent and tone for the entire staff. Make sure your leaders recognize more than they criticize, practice what they preach, and listen as much as they talk.

### #2: Empower Communication

Articulation and understanding are important in any work environment, but when you're in the business of saving lives, communication is essential.

That said, how effectively we communicate and how often we choose to do it rarely align with our goals. The intention is there, but for some reason, we seem to fall short on delivery and response.

Is it a transparency issue? Maybe. Or it could be lack of time. Perhaps we're intimidated by our supervisors or peers. Or we're hesitant to say what everyone needs to hear.

The truth is: no one is 100% perfect. Feedback is a vital part of how we learn and grow.<sup>[24]</sup> We must be able to tell

others what we expect of them and understand what's expected in return. However, that's not all. People also need to know what they're doing right and how they can improve; they need to know what they do makes a difference; they need to know they're not alone in their triumphs or their struggles.

When performance is kept a secret or policies appear fuzzy, it's impossible to keep moving forward. And in a culture of "if it isn't documented, it didn't happen," transparent communication is beyond mission-critical; it's vital for survival.

### #3: Demand Consistency

Every organization must consistently strive to avoid sending mixed messages to their employees. Instead, values-driven policies should be implemented to ensure success. Leaders at all levels of the organization must reinforce organizational values and policies at every opportunity. This includes leading by example, so the appropriate course of action is clear. A leader's conduct and every decision should be a primary illustration of the organization's values and policy in action.<sup>[25]</sup>

Have you ever worked in an organization where the rules changed depending on which supervisor was in charge? It's frustrating, to say the least. After a while, you may find yourself scheduling your days off to coincide with the names on the duty chart, rather than deal with the aggravation and stress.

It's not that certain supervisors are better than others, but they may have a way of doing things that doesn't line up with the way you were taught—or clashes with what you believe. It's a classic case of inconsistency. This type of conflict and disparity runs rampant in public service organizations. It degrades productivity and incites discord among personnel, supervisors, and entire divisions.

What can you do about it? Encourage your organization to develop standard guidelines. Of course, there will be times when the situation dictates a bit of deviation from the norm, but those days should be the exception, not the rule. No matter the circumstance, employees should feel confident that their actions are governed by their organization's standard operating procedures, not their supervisor's personal preferences.

## #4. Reinforce Accountability

There's a popular myth in the workplace that asserts the belief that accountability is the same as micromanagement. It's not. They are two very different words.

Merriam-Webster defines accountability as "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions." In contrast, the definition of micromanagement is: "to manage especially with excessive control or attention to details."

Holding people responsible for their actions isn't just common sense, it's a cornerstone of modern society. When supervisors and senior leaders ignore bad habits, poor performance, disrespect or lack of integrity, it's the same as condoning it. Not only do these behaviors cause negativity and stress in the workplace, but they also drive down productivity.

According to a 2016 survey conducted by research firm, Gallup Inc., unengaged employees, cost companies anywhere between \$480-\$600 billion dollars a year.<sup>[26]</sup>

If there are no repercussions or rewards, where is the incentive to do more than just show up? Yes, your best people will take on neglected duties, but for how long? Everyone has a breaking point. Sooner or later even the eternal optimists will lose hope, stop fighting, and succumb to an unhealthy organizational culture.

If you want to keep your top performers invested and engaged—it's time to hold everyone responsible from the top-down.

## #5: Affirm Good Performance and Advocate Support

Acknowledging and affirming an employee's good performance in the workplace is a powerful way to maximize job performance and satisfaction. This can only be accomplished with effective and frequent positive reinforcement.<sup>[27]</sup>

Creating a culture of continuous feedback utilizing positive reinforcement allows employees to develop, grow and take pride in their work. Environments in which leaders encourage conversations as opposed to lectures have higher retention rates and more positive interactions between supervisory staff and their subordinates.

Productive communication is key. Regardless of ranking, organizations must recognize all staff members as people.

Unlike traditional work relationships, law enforcement, emergency service, and healthcare professionals operate as extended families. They spend holidays together, form bonds through shared experiences, and act as each other's support system.

As the head of their team, leaders must make it their mission to understand what their employees are going through both on and off the job. When difficult moments arrive, leaders can become a strong source of support for their entire team. Whether they choose to impart wisdom or just listen, empathy and reassurance create opportunities for leaders to earn their employees trust and reinforce organizational support.

Support is critical because organizations do not accomplish goals and objectives by themselves. Organizational accomplishments are achieved through people. Therefore, in order to accomplish organizational



goals and objectives in a productive and healthy environment, leaders need to have the courage to embrace excellence, fight mediocrity, say no to the status quo, and strive for a culture where excellence is recognized, rewarded, and becomes the norm.

Conversely, if staff members don't receive feedback or support from their organization, they withdraw and become stressed. Those involved in law enforcement, emergency services, and healthcare are especially susceptible to burnout and compassion fatigue. Daily exposure to trauma, life-altering events, and split-second decisions that are scrutinized by the media can penetrate even the toughest exterior. Coupled with a toxic work environment, stress can lead to excessive absenteeism and voluntary separation. When that happens, it's detrimental for both the employee and the organization.

Showing solidarity with those on the front line is paramount for the health of your staff and your organization. If your organization is looking to boost retention, examining your employee recognition and support system is an excellent place to start.

## Engineering a Retention-Focused Solution

Now that we've decoded the root causes, covered the cost and laid the framework for reducing voluntary turnover, we can begin designing a solution.

External factors aside every organization has unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Suffice to say, those challenges pose obstacles to a one-size-fits-all approach to retention and early intervention. While developing a solution to address every scenario is complicated, we know there are stark similarities between the underlying causes of voluntary turnover and an organization's internal processes.

With that in mind, we can customize an ideal solution that identifies and overcomes each challenge.


### Weighing Current Assessment Methods

Setting organizational objectives and employee-level goals are starting points, but finding ways to implement these practices is another matter altogether.


For years personnel departments have relied on three common tactics to identify problem areas or spotlight top performers. Unfortunately, these solutions fall short for a myriad of reasons. Let's take a look at why the status quo continually fails to elicit change or produce mutually beneficial results.

 Annual performance assessments often produce weak or irrelevant results.

The temptation to reduce tension by withholding information can keep both parties from gaining actionable insight. Furthermore, most evaluations take place long after an incident occurs, making it difficult to give praise or gain perspective of how well your employees react and perform.

 Surveys are another option, but again how much information can you gather from a checkbox or a series of close-ended questions?

Most employees will either disregard the survey or take the path of least resistance by blindly checking the same boxes as their peers.

 Traditional employee files are a staple for organizations, but they possess far more drawbacks than advantages.

Most files are kept in inconvenient or inaccessible locations, making it difficult to update or revise information. Cramped storage areas waste precious space and limit our ability to gain access for file updates or reviews.

On top of that, paperwork is hard to read and easy to lose.

Even worse: When an employee changes roles or moves up in the organization, their new supervisors may have to wade through miles of red tape just to gain an accurate picture of their new hire.

Adding to these challenges, if employees requests to review their progress reports, it can result in weeks of back and forth. First, the employee must submit a request, and wait days for someone to track down the file. Then, supervisors must read and sort through a mountain of information before they can sit down with the employee and begin their initial review.

Who has time for that? The whole process acts as a deterrent for performance assessment.

**Let's face facts. It's time to rethink the way we develop our employees and manage our organizations.**

Issue	Challenge	Solution
Poor Leadership	Supervisors lack the skills and finesse needed to lead effectively	Identify, train and evaluate leaders
Poor Communication	Peers and leadership rarely communicate expectations and needs	Enable timely and effective communication
Lack of Engagement	Employees lack passion, motivation and a sense of purpose	Empower constructive feedback and recognition
Lack of Accountability	Incidents are missed, ignored or improperly addressed	Define, organize and communicate guidelines, expectations, and consequences
Lack of Transparency	Employee files and performance reports are locked up or hidden away	Allow employees access to clear and upfront documentation
Lack of Support	Employees feel unsupported by their leaders and organizations	Monitor performance and provide support for at-risk employees
Limited Growth	Employers don't set goals or provide pathways for recognition and promotion	Plot goals and set accomplishment milestones
Declining Morale	Plot goals and set accomplishment milestones	Recognize and address issues before they escalate
Increased Stress	Mismanagement, growing workloads, and toxic work environments are hazardous to engagement	Deploy channels for both supervisors and employees to voice concerns

### Optimizing Employee Development for the 21st Century

Managing, monitoring, and mentoring employees is an integral part of any supervisor's role. But these activities tend to take a back seat in emergency operations where mission-critical operations must take priority.

There are only so many hours in a shift and so many tasks one person can juggle without sacrificing effectiveness. However, there is a simpler, more productive way for leaders to solicit and distribute feedback, set goals, and gain perspective into employee mindset and the day-to-day workings of their organization.

By removing the need for mountains of paperwork, rows of filing cabinets, and incessant time constraints, performance management software is changing the way we operate.

Using these tools, leadership and human resource departments are gaining a birds-eye view into the people and processes that fuel their organization. Some programs even allow employees to participate in their own development by providing them space to qualify their actions or reflect on the need for improvement.

## Boosting Engagement with Performance Management

As opposed to the typical quality assessment and improvement process, performance management incorporates employee development and review into everyday operations.

How? By measuring and recording the steps we take every day.

Ideally, everyone in your organization engages in organizational development. Whether it takes the form of constructive comments, conversational questions, informal discussions, or much-needed praise, we all contribute to enhancing our workplace culture.

Most often, we dismiss these instances as commonplace. Yet, in doing so, we fail to reap the benefits gained from these interactions.

Here is where performance management tools can help. Unlike traditional HR software, performance management systems empower employees to take a proactive role in their workplace. Besides encouraging constant communication, many of these platforms provide a place for employees to share knowledge or insights with leaders and other coworkers.

Not only do these activities heighten morale, but they also foster healthy interactions between employees and supervisory staff.

Inspiring positive discussions in the workplace is one of the top ways to boost engagement. When we eliminate the “us versus them” mindset from the equation, both leaders and employees will start to become more comfortable sharing ideas and working together to overcome obstacles and achieve common goals.



## Creating a Culture of Feedback

Performance management systems can serve as checks and balances for consistent and reliable assessments.

Using real-time data collection, personnel directors and supervisors can establish baselines, set recognition triggers, schedule evaluations, initiate task reminders, and receive early-intervention alerts based on organizational measurements and preferences.

For example: When an entry triggers an alert, the software automatically notifies the proper hierarchy. From there, leaders can evaluate whether the incident warrants recognition, discussion, further investigation or immediate action.

This process creates a win-win situation for everyone. Leaders gain a higher level of operational awareness and employees receive timely feedback, continual coaching, and one-on-one support. With these systems in place, communication becomes fluid, trust-based and transparent.

Because performance management software follows a transparent, trackable and objective path, both the organization and the employee can be assured all interventions follow the appropriate channels and comply with organizational procedures.



## Evaluating Your Next Steps

Keeping everyone engaged, and ensuring operations run smoothly shouldn't add to your workload. As a busy professional, you don't have the luxury of spending hours with your ears glued to the floor, and your hands chained to a clipboard or computer.

When choosing an employee performance system, be sure to seek a solution that helps you save time and simplify your duties without creating additional tasks.

While performance management provides a clear route to improving your efficiency and workplace culture, not all programs are created equal.

With that in mind, we've compiled a list of 21 "must-haves" to help you select a system that delivers the benefits, and support you need, while adapting to your organization, and the way you work.

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### Your Solution Should:

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- √ Cost less than replacing an employee
- √ Boost morale and engagement
- √ Permit employees to view their file and conduct self-reflection
- √ Identify and magnify leadership ability
- √ Assist with succession planning
- √ Inspire trust and loyalty
- √ Map employee goals and monitor career-wide progression
- √ Preserve organizational wisdom for future education
- √ Provide transparent documentation of progress, training, and certifications
- √ Enable automatic and consistent review of performance
- √ Empower both positive and constructive feedback
- √ Enhance communication throughout the workplace
- √ Ensure employees receive adequate support and coaching
- √ Encourage day-to-day peer recognition and mentorship
- √ Simplify evaluations
- √ Mitigate liability for both the employee and the organization
- √ Eliminate excessive paperwork
- √ Incorporate flexibility and customized settings
- √ Include permissions-based settings for confidential entries
- √ Organize incident and observation reports and automatically tracks timelines
- √ Allow you to customize an early intervention system tailored to your specific needs.

## Conclusion

Ready or not, public service is at the crossroads between recruitment and retention. Will your organization patch the holes left by vacancies, or find a better way to keep your best employees?

Recruitment and retention are some of the most significant obstacles facing public service organizations. Unfortunately, the problem doesn't end there—documentation shows a shrinking talent pool. In addition to the obvious repercussions and hidden costs, cultural erosion can spread through divisions and drive losses to detrimental levels. Many organizations fail to recover and continue to spiral downwards; however, that doesn't have to happen.

In this age of social media and widespread demand for transparency, it's paramount to track how your leaders and staff conduct themselves as representatives of your organization.

Throughout this report we've deconstructed voluntary turnover, described the real cost of losing an employee and explained why a performance management system is not just a luxury—it's an essential investment for the viability of your organization's future.

## About Guardian Tracking

Guardian Tracking was born out of a passion for the job, and an unwavering pride in the dedication and commitment public safety professionals display every day.

After more than three decades in law enforcement, two police lieutenants set out to develop a software that could meet the industry's increasing need for a comprehensive, timely, transparent, and objective employee management system.

While there were other products on the market, none afforded supervisors the ability to portray an accurate picture of the whole employee; nor did they provide a mechanism to identify possible behavior patterns for evaluation and intervention.

So instead of waiting for the corporate world to finally discover a better way to watch over their fellow officers, LT. Leon Wasilewski and LT. Mike Reed, decided to take matters into their own hands. In 2007, they contacted a software developer who helped them transform their vision into the performance management system that's known today as Guardian Tracking.

Fast forward to 2019, and Guardian Tracking is still growing strong. In addition to Law Enforcement Agencies, Guardian Tracking currently assists firefighters; EMS providers; emergency communication professionals; and healthcare practitioners, to strengthen and enhance their organizational culture.

At Guardian Tracking we believe that positive recognition should be part of the everyday process. We believe career counseling is most effective when it becomes second nature. We believe if an event turns your head, it should be celebrated or addressed immediately—not months down the road. Most of all we believe that employees are so much more than human capital. They're people—people who deserve to be recognized for the contributions they make every day.

To learn how Guardian Tracking can help your organization simplify and enhance performance management, contact us today at (888) 695-0084 or schedule your free demo online at [www.guardiantracking.com](http://www.guardiantracking.com)



"I just completed 26 evaluations for my group and in going over them, I felt a very strong sense of gratification that our employees are getting the best, on point and comprehensive evaluations they have ever gotten. I know that is true for more than 25 years that I have been here at least."

"Our management team now has a place to track positive employee performance giving us a truly accurate reflection of the employee. This has completely changed the attitude within our agency creating a better environment and culture"

—Angel Geoghagan, Ph. D,

Standards of Compliance Manager  
of the Hamilton County Emergency  
Communications District

[Listen to Angel's story](#)

"Simply stated, their software, business model, and customer service is like nothing I have ever experienced in ALL of my many years of dealing with products and vendors."

—Rob Hauck,

Assistant City Manager, Tomball, TX

[Discover more about Guardian Tracking in the IACP's October 2018 edition of Police Chief Magazine](#)

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