

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE

*DESIGN & BUILD*



Why each stage of the lifecycle is equally important to an organisation's productivity levels, retention rates and future recruitment

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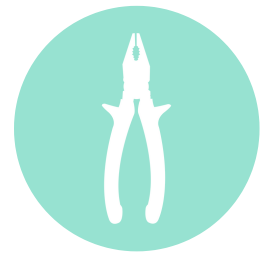


Employee Engagement is not a new concept and by 2020, we know of its benefits; increased productivity, work quality and retaining top talent to name a few. The roadmap to retaining employees and ensuring they remain invested in both their work and the organisation they work for, is an ongoing process and can involve different strategies and techniques depending on what stage an employee is at within their employment lifecycle; from the employee's first day, to the moment they deliver their resignation. While many organisations invest a lot of time and energy into the early stages of an employee's life-cycle (attracting potential candidates, selecting a potential employee and transitioning them into a new role) research has shown that ongoing training and development is crucial for retaining employees and that an employee's 'separation stage' (when an employee leaves the organisation) can actually have a positive flow-on effect for attracting and recruiting new talent and therefore must be considered as part of a company's overall retention strategy.

At Design & Build we understand the value in finding, securing, and retaining quality talent. Which is why our consultants not only focus on the 'recruitment' stage of the life-cycle, but invest in after-care processes to help new employees transition into their new employment and stay up-to-date on the best business practices to help market their organisation, cultivate a positive workplace culture, and develop their employee's skillset; all things that are integral in continuing the cycle of attracting and retaining talent. As the research in this paper demonstrates, every stage of an employee's life at an organisation impacts future recruitment opportunities. Consequently, in the following sections we delve into each stage of the lifecycle; what research indicates, and our own findings on how engaging employees and successfully transitioning them through each stage of the lifecycle can be achieved.

## OUR RESEARCH

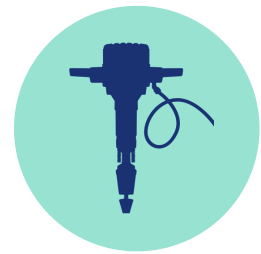
To write this article, Design & Build used and collated data from their extensive database consisting of 55,000 professionals within the construction, professional services, rail, and engineering industries. This information was augmented with survey data collected from over 200 respondents within Design & Build's professional online network (LinkedIn following). This data was then supported by secondary information sourced from nationally and globally recognised authority figures on business development and human resources, including LinkedIn, Harvard Business Review and PwC. Every secondary sourced reference can be found in the references section.



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# WHAT IS THE EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE?



## CYCLE SUMMARY

Also referred to as the talent lifecycle, the employment life-cycle represents the total employee experience; the collection of encounters an employee will have with their organisation from the very first day they apply for a position to the day they leave. In both Design & Build's professional experience and the majority of literature on business management, these encounters can be grouped into six key phases which an employee should experience chronologically as they naturally progress through the company.

Each phase is intrinsically linked and importantly, an employee's experience

during each phase will add as a building block for the next. For example, if a company does not respond to an employee's training request or invest in their ongoing development, it will have a significant impact on the retention phase of the lifecycle and how committed the employee is to the organisation. Similarly, if a company or recruitment organisation has not done their due diligence in the recruitment stage of the lifecycle - perhaps choosing a candidate whose previous experience isn't enough- that employee is going to have a poor onboarding experience. All phases of the lifecycle are related and each needs to be treated with the same level of focus and weight in order for a business to effectively grow it's workforce and maintain a positive and productive work culture.





# PHASE 1: ATTRACTION



The first time an employee actively engages with an organisation can occur in several ways, often before they've even decided to apply for a role or are consciously looking. If the potential employee is seeking a new role, they might have come across an organisation's job advertisement through a dedicated employment marketplace like Seek or LinkedIn or when researching different companies via online workplace reviews. If a potential candidate is more passive in the job seeking process, they may have come into contact with the company via Facebook or Instagram or stumbled across their website, especially if the company is well-known or has a strong online presence.

Compared to the other stages of the employee life-cycle, there is limited control an organisation has over how they attract potential candidates. However, there are a few key things a company can do to maximise their talent pool and keep it engaged. Firstly, a company should focus on their branding and marketplace perception; do they have a good reputation amongst the community or their dedicated industry and does this audience consider the company as a desirable and aspirational place to work?

Design & Build have previously written some articles and conducted research on the benefit of cultivating a strong employer brand, which found that: 84% of job seekers saw the reputation of a

potential company as an important factor, while 50% of candidates say they wouldn't work for a company with a bad reputation – even for a pay increase. A great way to boost your company's perceptions or reputation is by sharing or promoting positive feedback or reviews from those connected to the organisation, to demonstrate their credibility and trustworthiness; perhaps it's dedicating a page on your website to customer testimonials or promoting a case study with a notable or high-profile client.

Loyal employees are probably an organisation's greatest asset during the attraction phase of the employee life-cycle, as current or previous employees who've either had a positive or negative experience working at your organisation will spread the word, and again people tend to trust someone's word or personal experience over any type of formal advertisement or promotion. Employee referral programs, where employees are encouraged to promote the benefits of their organisation to their greater network, through offering them some kind of incentive in return (either monetary or non-financial) is another great strategy to boosting a company's employer branding.

Secondly, when considering hiring for a new role, a company must consider their target market. More specifically, the desires and interests of their prospective candidates; what would they want from a role and what

# PHASE 1: ATTRACTION



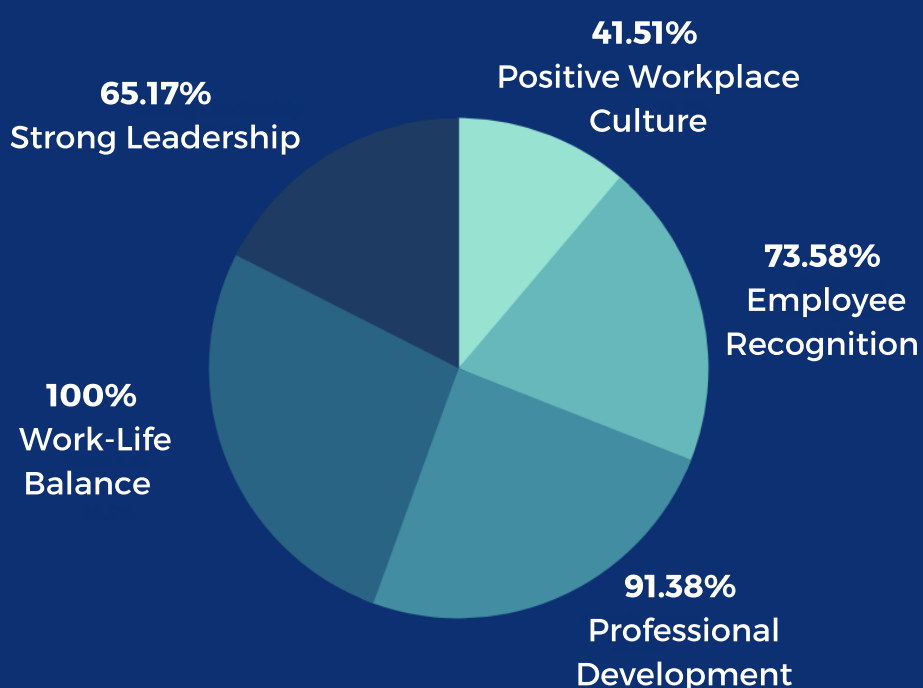
would they need for a positive employee experience. This could be flexible work options, a collaborative team environment, or opportunities to learn and develop their skillset.

A great way to determine this is to engage in market research, which does not have to involve things like focus groups and third-party agencies, which can be time consuming and costly. When Design & Build recently contemplated hiring new candidates, one of the first steps taken was to survey our network and customer and client base (through both LinkedIn & Survey Monkey) on the top five attributes they valued in a new employer. Work-life balance received top billing within the survey, where 100% of those asked considered it the most important attribute when looking at potential companies. Coming in at number two was professional development with 91.38% of votes and the

third most popular value was employee recognition which received 73.58% of votes.

Once an organisation has first-hand information like this, they can utilise it to attract and resonate with their target demographic. For example, promoting the fact that they offer an in-house training program consistently across all of their touchpoints will ensure they're effectively reaching and gaining interest from those candidates that value professional development. This includes events, the company's website and social media. It's also useful for a company to have a 'careers' section on their website to make it easy for eligible candidates to come to you. Design & Build delved into the attributes potential candidates look for in their potential employees, in a recent blog; the key results of which, are demonstrated below:

## TOP 5 ATTRIBUTES PEOPLE WANT FROM NEW EMPLOYEES



## PHASE 2: RECRUITMENT



Once an organisation has attracted a relevant applicant pool, it must then narrow down its selection to bring in the best candidates. This selection process is known as the recruitment stage of the employee lifecycle and includes cultivating and advertising an available role, initial screening calls and conducting job interviews which will ultimately lead to choosing a future employee. At this point, an organisation can choose to recruit independently or they can choose to reach out to a recruitment company. The recruitment phase of the employee lifecycle can often be a time-consuming and costly process, especially if not executed correctly the first time. The benefit a recruiting organisation can provide, is that it minimises this potential burden as they will be coordinating the majority of the process. Furthermore, a recruitment company can utilise their own expertise, market knowledge and vast network to select quality candidates, helping to ensure the organisation hires the right person for the right role, the first time.

Whether an organisation uses an external recruitment company, or chooses to do this in-house, there is still a set process which research indicates is the most effective. First and foremost, experts recommend organisations carefully consider how the role they are recruiting for is advertised, in order to ensure they attract the best and most relevant list of candidates to choose from. It's a waste of time when a company is

looking for a residential construction project manager, yet keep receiving applications from carpenters. To avoid this, an organisation should ensure the job advertisement has a clear description of the role, the experience needed and a full list of responsibilities to help attract the right candidates. The job advertisement should also provide details on the workplace and the available perks to further showcase the desirability of the role.

A common mistake when creating a job advertisement according to experts, is not providing an honest job description. The job market can be competitive, and an organisation might feel pressured to 'lure in' candidates, but over-selling a role or what an organisation can provide to a potential employee will only result in dissatisfaction further down the track, causing the new hire to become disengaged with the organisation.

Once settling on the right job advertisement, the organisation can start the selection process. This process involves many decisions; how many interviews you should have, whether any technical tests need to be included, how to screen resumes, what methods you should use to avoid bias and how to do referral checks.

These decisions will depend on the specific role an organisation is recruiting for (the seniority level, the responsibilities involved etc.) however, no matter the role, an



## PHASE 2: RECRUITMENT



an organisation should always ensure they are being transparent and honest with their candidates. Candidates want and need regular touchpoints with a prospective employer in order to stay engaged during the recruitment process.

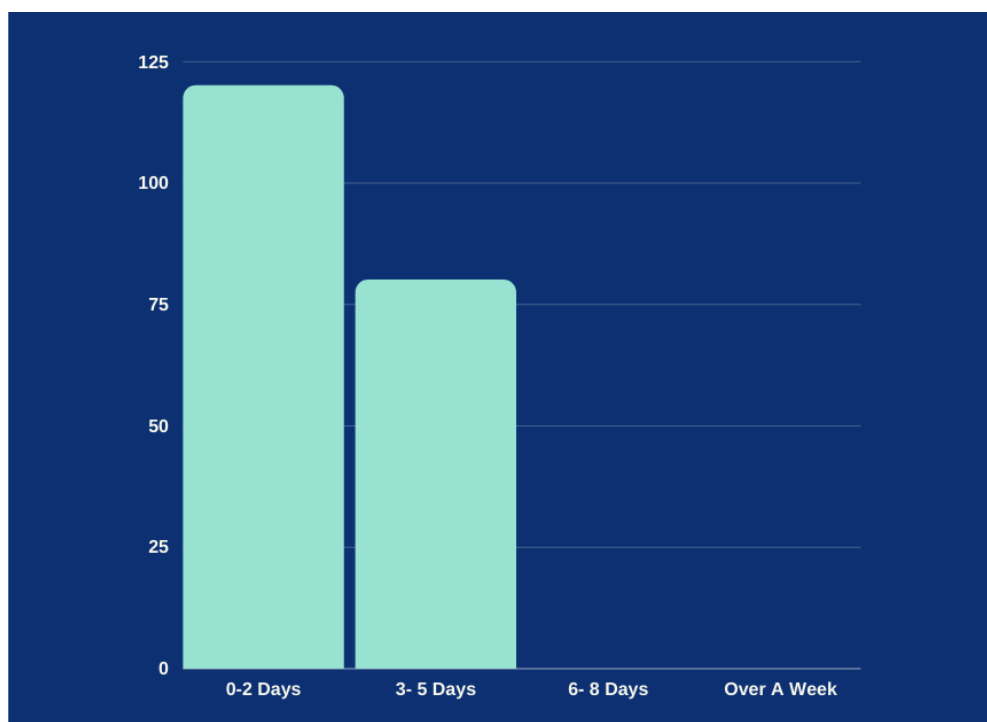
The importance of this was illustrated in a separate survey where the Design & Build team surveyed our own network on what they valued most from prospective employers during the recruitment process. Of over 200 respondents, all ranked that hearing feedback (whether positive or negative) within five days of being in contact with the prospective employer was most important in their job search. At Design & Build, our personal recommendation is to provide feedback to candidates within three days of an interview. These statistics reinforce the importance of transparency; while it might be difficult to update all candidates every day, or

every five days, people appreciate consistent engagement from prospective employers and receiving honest feedback - good or bad. No one likes to be left in the dark or kept waiting, especially when it's related to something as important as a person's career prospects.

In the same vein, over 40% of respondents in the same Design & Build survey said they thought more favourably of organisations that provided feedback during their job search, even if that feedback wasn't good news. This again indicates, that regularly checking in and updating candidates will create a positive impression and will ultimately lead to better recruitment outcomes. For Design & Build, a big part of this is adhering to timelines; if you've said that you'd get back to a candidate before the end of the week with interview feedback, failing to contact them within that timeframe doesn't indicate that you care and value their time and effort.

40%

RESPONDENTS  
THOUGHT  
FAVOURABLY OF  
ORGANISATIONS  
THAT PROVIDED  
FEEDBACK DURING  
THEIR JOB SEARCH



## PHASE 3: ONBOARDING



According to research, most employees will have decided within the first 90 days of their new role, whether they want to remain at a company. Considering this and the cost of losing an employee within the first year, keeping a new employee actively engaged during onboarding is critical for the organisation's overall productivity. Onboarding lays the foundation for the employee-employer relationship, and to ensure a smooth transition for the new employee, the onboarding process should involve both formal and informal training, regular review sessions and above all, makes the new employee feel supported. Alarming however, many employees don't feel their company has an effective onboarding process. In Design & Build's own research, 64.40% of our online network claimed that they've experienced a poor onboarding process during their working life. The most common issues listed being:

a lack of formal training, not having the necessary equipment and resources set up beforehand, and a culture which doesn't foster inclusion and learning.

On the flip-side, over 60% of respondents who had a positive onboarding experience, said this contributed to their overall happiness at work. This finding is reinforced by a majority of literature which draws correlations from an organisation's onboarding process to their retention rate. One of the key first steps in mapping out a thorough and effective onboarding program is to establish the difference between onboarding and orientation. Orientation will usually occur during an employee's first week and focuses on an initial introduction to an employee's new role and the organisation itself. While HR professionals recommend elements of orientation to be included within an onboarding program, it



# 64.40%

Of Respondents Have  
Experienced A Poor  
Onboarding Experience



## PHASE 3: ONBOARDING



can't represent the whole process.

Onboarding aims to fully integrate a new employee into their organisation and many experts believe this to take up to 6 to 12 months. This was reflected in our own research when respondents who were asked to elaborate on their bad onboarding experiences cited programs that only lasted a few days or a few weeks.

Organisations are also recommended to break up their onboarding process into stages, starting with pre-boarding, which is the period from when an employee signs their employment contract to the first day of employment. During this process it's important for an organisation to keep in regular contact and engage with their new employees. This stage has become increasingly important during 2020, with so many new starters having to start their role remotely. Within our own research, over 84% of respondents said having all materials and equipment ordered prior to their start date helped make their onboarding experience. Consequently, many organisations have had to be proactive on preparing their new employees- things like sending relevant equipment and necessary resources ahead of time, adding teams to group chats and passing on key company information prior to the start date so new employees could hit the ground running. Engaging in pre-boarding puts both the new employee and organisation at a great advantage, as it will help the employee feel included and more

prepared, which can then fuel their productivity in those initial few weeks.

From the first day an employee 'officially' starts at the company, they'll have their orientation which includes all of the initial introductions that will help familiarise themselves with the company. This includes things like meeting the team (including direct reports and/or managers), going through the organisation's company values and any mandatory training; cyber security, anti-bullying or sexual harassment, in addition to any specific technical training they might need to start their new role.

However, a key portion of research has shown that one of the biggest things new employees value is the ongoing feedback and goal setting an organisation can provide. Candidates within Design & Build's network listed having open lines of communication and expectations and goals set from the start, as the most effective onboarding strategies they've experienced. This is reinforced by many HR professionals and Design & Build's own practices, which prioritise scheduling regular reviews with new employees (every fortnight or every month) to better gauge the level of understanding a new employee has and gives both parties a chance to provide constructive feedback. It also ensures that if certain things aren't working, new employees have a safe platform to voice this, and by identifying problems early managers can then contribute to developing resolutions.



## PHASE 3: ONBOARDING



Review sessions also provide managers with the chance to set short-term goals. As indicated by Design & Build's own network, goal-setting is an effective strategy within the onboarding process as it establishes realistic expectations for a new employee and instils an automatic sense of purpose and clear targets they can work towards. Goal setting also makes it easier to discuss any gaps in a new employee's skill set or identify their growth areas. By achieving these goals, new employees are able to build their confidence and gain a better understanding on how their contribution fits into the larger organisation.

Because onboarding plays such an integral role in an employee's loyalty to an organisation, Design & Build have created a dedicated after-care program as part of our recruitment services, which focuses on making that initial process as easy as possible. Our consultants remain in constant contact with both the candidate and client in the initial six months of a candidate's new role to determine how they're both finding the experience, establish if there is any constructive feedback to pass on and cooperate closely with the client's induction and performance review process. This makes sure we are putting the candidate in the best position for ongoing success.

## PHASE 4: DEVELOPMENT



The development phase of the employee life-cycle is essential, not only in motivating and encouraging an individual employee, but also in improving the organisation's productivity through progressing an employee's abilities and skillset via training. The more advanced an employee becomes in their abilities, the better they can perform their job and consequently contribute to the organisation. The development phase is also intrinsically linked to technology.

In this day and age, it has become imperative for all employees to keep up to date with all of the digital tools available to them, especially with so many of us now working remotely and depending on technology to connect with each other more than ever before. More importantly, Design & Build's own research has indicated how valuable learning and development (L&D) opportunities are, with 91.38% of respondents in Design & Build's survey ranking it as the top thing they look for within a new employer. Similarly, a PWC study (2011, p4) showed that millennials ranked L&D as the number one benefit an employer could offer.

There is a common misconception that learning & development is an expensive initiative for a business, however there are many cost-effective methods an organisation can use, such as peer coaching and mentoring, which relies on an organisation's own talent to showcase their particular skillset or expertise with the

greater team. Organisation's can hold weekly sessions, in which a team member who has expertise in one area, can share this knowledge with their colleagues and encourage peer-based learning. Not only is this a cost effective strategy for the business, but research has indicated that it's also great for fostering employee engagement and innovation within a company.

It is also important to remember that besides formal training needs, people have personal development goals they want to achieve. Perhaps they would like to work more on their leadership skills or their assertiveness, so factoring this in when developing an employee's learning and development plan is important. Asking an employee about their learning and development goals during the recruitment and onboarding phase will help identify these personal development goals and gives an organisation more time to prepare and customise their learning and development strategy to best suit the individual's learning needs.

## PHASE 5: RETENTION



The retention phase of the employee life-cycle focuses on how to build and develop an employee's commitment to their role, their team and their organisation. By the retention stage of the life-cycle, the novelty of a new role has well and truly worn off and employees can start to feel stagnant and disengaged. To counteract this, research recommends that organisations should invest in activities that recognise employee accomplishments and demonstrate how much they value their employee's commitment to the company.

Interestingly, in research carried out by Professor Ian Larkin of Harvard Business School (2013) recognition given in a singular context like 'top salesperson' or 'perfect attendance' awards for example, actually had a detrimental effect on productivity.

While researchers initially found this scheme to improve punctuality and attendance from workers who previously had a low attendance record, there was a 6 to 8% productivity decrease in employees who had a previously excellent attendance record. Researchers in the study believed this to be because they were feeling demotivated; now employees who used to show up late were receiving praise for doing what they'd been doing all along. This study demonstrates the complexity of human nature; no two people are motivated in the same way and therefore they should not be recognised or rewarded in the same way. Instead, organisations should focus on offering a range of recognition tactics across the organisation and not just focusing on financial incentives.

In Design & Build's own research, 61% of respondents in a recent survey said that either a pay rise or promotion motivated them to perform in their current role. However, another 36% listed a positive work culture as their key motivator to stronger performance and 2.4% listed formal awards & recognition. Which further reinforces the theory that while many employees can be motivated by traditional rewards like salary and formal titles, no two employees are the same or will have the same needs and desires. Consequently, an organisation's awards and recognition scheme should reflect these differences.



**61%**  
of  
Respondents  
Value a Pay  
Rise or  
Promotion





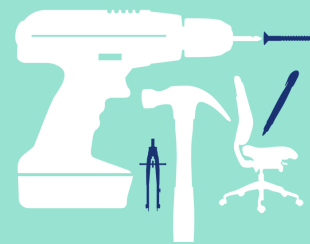
## PHASE 5: RETENTION



Some alternate ways to recognise employees could involve focusing on creating shared experiences, where an emotional bond between an employee and their organisation is strengthened. This could be through celebrating employee anniversaries and asking employees to join in on celebrating noteworthy corporate achievements and business wins. Organisations can also look in to certifying aspects of a company's curriculum or supporting an employee's own learning aspirations. By actively recognising and encouraging an employee's desire to learn, an organisation is able to demonstrate how much they value the employee's contribution to the business. Finally, some organisations have experimented with 'innovation labs' which reward employees with the space, time and encouragement to work on ideas of interest to them outside of their regular responsibilities. These labs or dedicated 'creative time' recognise a person's initiative to explore avenues that are meaningful to them, while at the same time being valuable to the organisation.

Workplace culture can also play a big role in employee retention. So much so that in a 2018 LinkedIn survey 70% of survey respondents in the U.S said they wouldn't work for a leading company if it meant having to endure a bad or 'toxic' workplace culture (McQueen, 2018). Furthermore, 65% of these respondents said they would put up with lower pay and 26% said they would forego a fancy title, rather than deal with a

**65%**  
Of Respondents  
Would Put Up  
With Lower Pay  
Than A 'Toxic  
Workplace '



bad work environment. These statistics are explored further on Design & Build's most recent blog on workplace culture.

While you could dedicate a whole paper to the importance and subjectivity of company culture (as each organisational culture is unique and reflects its own business goals) there are a few common factors that create a positive environment for employees across the board. When consulting and training company The Energy Project teamed up with Harvard Business Review (McCarthy, C, Schwartz, T. (2007.)

## PHASE 5: RETENTION



they discovered that employee happiness revolved around four core human needs being met: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs.

Within a workplace setting, this translates to ensuring your employees are feeling seen and valued at work; having the space and time to collaborate and be creative within your work, feel a deep sense of belonging with the company and feel like you're part of something worthwhile. Examples of ways workplaces have addressed these core needs are through recognition programs (awards, bonus schemes), learning and development opportunities, flexible working options and philanthropic opportunities. Again, these core needs are reflected in the feedback from Design & Build's own survey on the key attribute's employees look for in an organisation, first expressed on page one.

## PHASE 6: SEPARATION



The final stage of the employee lifecycle focuses on how to manage an employee's departure from an organisation, whether they are dismissed, retire or leave to seek new opportunities. Many organisations underestimate the importance this stage plays within the employment lifecycle, thinking that a departing employee will no longer be relevant to an organisation. However, 'Happy leavers' (employees that leave their organisation on good terms) can be a great source of new hire referrals and are more open to work or partner with the organisation in some capacity in the future. There is even an official term for employees who return to a former workplace at a later point in their careers – 'boomerang hires' – which occurs when organisations are able to form strong bonds with former employees and keep tabs on their professional development in order to eventually rehire them. Some organisations have even gone as far to say boomerang hires or setting up a rehire pipeline is their No. 1 source for quality hires.

Obviously, there will be instances where an organisation is limited in ensuring all of their employees leave under 'happy' circumstances. There will be times when an employee is made redundant or their contract is terminated, and in this case the chance of them returning to the organisation in any capacity is highly unlikely. Consequently, the following information relates specifically to employees who have decided to leave a company of their own accord.





## PHASE 6: SEPARATION



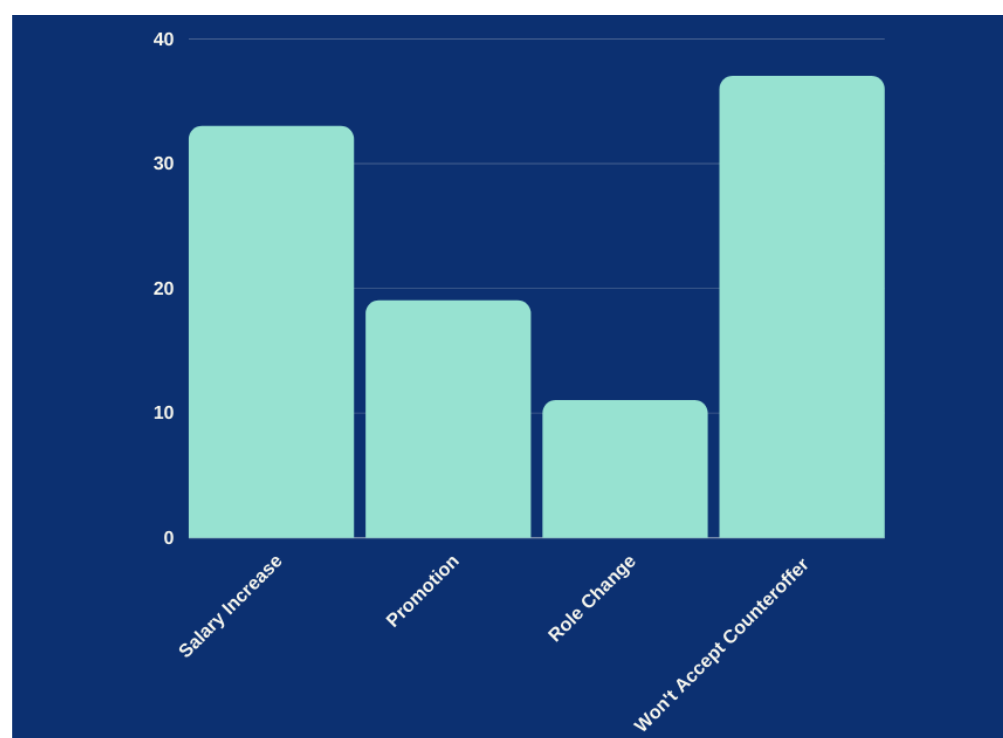
Firstly, when an employee announces they are leaving- especially if they are a highly valued employee- some organisations might issue a counteroffer to persuade them to stay. This counteroffer will usually be presented as a higher salary or some sort of promotion or title change to entice the employee to stay with the company. When Design & Build asked their own network on what type of counteroffer would convince them to stay with their current employer, 33% voted a salary increase, 19% voted for a promotion or title change and 11% said a role change. However, the majority of respondents (37%) said they would never consider a counteroffer.

Similarly, research conducted by consulting firms has indicated counteroffers don't work in retaining staff in the long run, with up to 80% of candidates who had accepted a

from their current employer, eventually leaving within six months. An American survey conducted by global technology & services practice Heidrick & Struggles which interviewed over 600 senior executives, found that counteroffers weren't an effective strategy in engaging employees (Borensztein, 2017). 40% of participants agreed that accepting a counteroffer from a current employer would adversely affect one's career. Respondents went on to list that some of the key negative consequences of accepting a counteroffer is diminished trust- HR leaders will always question the employee's loyalty going forward. Furthermore, it would negatively impact an employee's reputation by accepting an outside offer and then reneging it. Ultimately, as Jenny McCauley (2019), who is currently senior vice president of Administration at Southwestern Energy and who has also

**37%**

RESPONDENTS  
WOULD NOT TAKE  
A COUNTEROFFER





# PHASE 6: SEPARATION

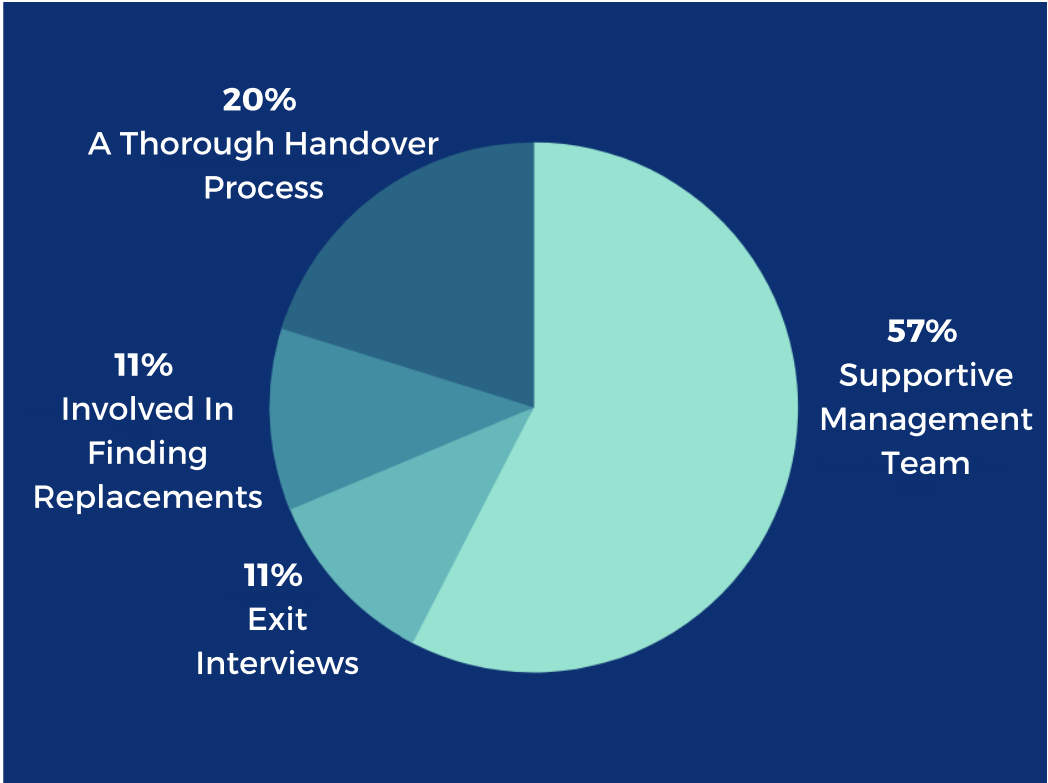


worked in HR at JPMorgan Chase and Hilton Hotels says, “someone who wants to leave is eventually going to leave anyway.” From an employer’s perspective, if an employee does not want to be at a company any longer, what benefit is there in forcing them to stay?

Rather than counteroffers, research suggests organisations should focus on making the transition process for leaving employees as smooth as possible. Design & Build conducted a survey within its professional network on the key traits that make leaving a workplace a positive experience and the majority of respondents (57%) said that a supportive management team made all the difference, while going through a thorough handover process was also considered important, receiving 20% of votes. Having

an exit interview and actively being involved in finding your replacement both received 11% of votes. So, what does a supportive management or thorough handover process consist of? There are a few things to keep in mind for maintaining engagement with employees at this stage, the main one being that when you first hear of an employee’s intention to depart or when they inform you of their decision, it is important to create as smooth and secure an ending for them as possible. While you might be disappointed to hear that they are leaving, especially if they are a valued employee, it is important to remember that the majority of these decisions are not personal. It is not necessarily a reflection on an individual person or company – especially if your

## WHAT MAKES LEAVING A WORKPLACE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE



## PHASE 6: SEPARATION



company has focused on engaging them in all previous stages of the employment cycle- but often at the stage they are at in their career. Consequently, HR professionals and team leaders must remain professional and express their willingness to support them in finishing up with the company. This involves working with them on how best to deliver the news to the rest of their team and seeking their input on how best to phase them off projects and to transfer responsibilities. If possible (if you have enough notice) it could also be beneficial to ensure they have a dedicated amount of time to provide training or support in the induction process of a replacement or at least create key handover documents.

Organisations should also utilise effective offboarding processes like exit interviews and feedback mechanisms, so that the organisation can learn why an employee is leaving and improve/rectify any processes that have caused that employee dissatisfaction. It can also be worthwhile for an organisation to create and maintain alumni channels so that they can easily stay in touch and reach out to valuable employees who have left, perhaps even sharing particular job opportunities if the relationship with alumni employees is particularly strong and the job in question showcases an organisation's growth and development.



# FINAL THOUGHTS



When trying to improve your recruitment processes or transition your employees into passionate advocates, the answer - as evidenced in our research- lies within the employee lifecycle. Keeping an employee's engagement levels consistent and maximised throughout each phase of the cycle is imperative, as when one phase is not executed properly, the whole chain is affected. Ensuring employees stay motivated and engaged throughout their time at an organisation and when they leave, not only improves retention rates and productivity in the company, but can help to attract new candidates, ensuring the lifecycle continues.

If you are looking for advice or more information on the employee life-cycle -especially the first three stages- Design & Build specialises in attracting, recruiting, and transitioning the right candidates to the right roles. Reach out to our team of consultants today to help ensure you are engaging with relevant candidates from the first day they interact with your company, to when they become fully fledged employees.

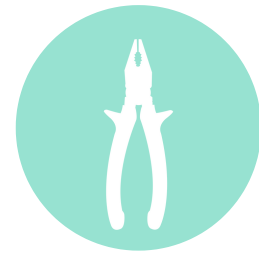
## CONTACT US

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