


# FREE GUIDE

# Breakthrough Talent Retention:

## How to keep your best people locked in and fired up.

THEBREAKTHROUGH.CO

# EMMA'S JOURNEY

Life's too short for boring ebooks. Learn about Breakthrough Talent Retention by reading Emma Smith's parable. A journey from overwhelmend to supreme award winner.


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In the heart of a sprawling landscape, where buildings dotted the horizon and innovation was the currency of success, stood a manufacturing icon admired for its robust operations and stellar workforce. At the helm of its human resources team was Emma, a leader whose wisdom and tenacity had steered her team through many a storm. Yet, beneath the surface of operational triumphs, a crisis simmered, threatening the core of the company's greatest asset - its people.

## THE CALL TO THE EXEC MEETING

Our story unfolds on a brisk autumn morning, as Emma entered the boardroom, her stride confident yet weighed down by the challenge that lay ahead. The room buzzed with the low murmur of the executive team, their expressions a mix of concern and expectation. The issue at hand was grave - a steady stream of star performers were leaving, each departure a blow to the morale and effectiveness of the team left behind.

As the meeting commenced, the air grew tense with urgent voices demanding a reversal of this troubling trend. The executives looked to Emma, entrusting her with the formidable task of stemming the tide of departures. The burden of expectation felt like a mountain resting on her shoulders, a test of her resolve and ingenuity.

Retreating to her office, Emma faced the daunting reality. The walls that had once echoed with plans of development and strategies for growth now seemed to close in on her, a stark reminder of the isolation that leadership often entails. The company, her professional home where she had envisioned making a lasting impact, now appeared as a complex puzzle with pieces slipping away.

In the quiet solitude of her office, surrounded by the symbols of her achievements and the tools of her trade, a spark of clarity broke through the fog of uncertainty. Emma realized that the path to retaining her star performers and reigniting the company's spirit would not be found in conventional wisdom or traditional HR tactics. A deeper journey was necessary, one that would require her to venture into the very heart of what makes a workplace not just functional, but truly magnetic.

It was a journey that would take her beyond the boundaries of her role, into the realms of leadership empathy, cultural vibrancy, and the profound connections that bind a team together. She would face challenges that tested her beliefs and assumptions, pushing her to explore new perspectives and solutions.

# BREAKTHROUGH #1: UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES STAR PERFORMERS

As Emma delved into the heart of what motivates star performers, she organized intimate gatherings within the company's industrial backdrop, listening intently to the voices of her most valued employees. Through these conversations, she began to piece together the mosaic of their motivations, recognizing the intricate interplay of recognition, growth, and purpose that fueled their drive.

Yet, amid these revelations, a singular insight struck her with profound clarity: the pivotal role of managers in the equation of retention. It dawned on Emma that these star performers, despite their resilience and self-motivation, were significantly influenced by their immediate supervisors. The managers, she realized, were the linchpins in the delicate balance of keeping these luminaries engaged and committed to the company.

Emma observed a recurring theme in the narratives shared by her star performers: a yearning for meaningful acknowledgment from their managers, not just in the form of annual bonuses or formal awards, but through daily gestures of appreciation and recognition of their efforts and contributions. It became evident that the current management practices were lacking in providing the nuanced and personalized recognition these high achievers craved.

Furthermore, the discussions unveiled a palpable thirst for growth and development opportunities among the star performers. They sought challenges that stretched their capabilities and allowed them to venture into new territories of innovation and creativity. However, Emma recognized a gap in the managers' ability to identify and craft these opportunities, leaving the star performers feeling underutilized and stagnant.

The longing for purpose and a connection to the company's broader mission was another critical insight Emma gathered. The star performers desired to see the impact of their work beyond the confines of their immediate tasks, aspiring to contribute to something greater. This highlighted a disconnect between the managers' communication of company goals and the individual's role in achieving them, leading to a sense of detachment among the star performers.

# UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES STAR PERFORMERS

Faced with these revelations, Emma acknowledged that the key to retaining her top talent lay in equipping the managers with the skills and awareness to meet the nuanced needs of their star performers. She envisioned a comprehensive development program for managers, focusing on enhancing their capabilities in providing personalized recognition, identifying and creating growth opportunities, and effectively communicating the company's vision and the individual's role in it.

This strategic shift towards empowering managers marked a turning point in Emma's quest. She initiated a manager training program emphasizing the importance of empathy, effective communication, and leadership in nurturing and retaining top talent. The program aimed to transform managers into skilled people leaders who could inspire, motivate, and connect with their teams on a deeper level.

As these new management practices began to take root, a transformative energy swept through the company. The star performers, once on the cusp of departure, found renewed vigor and alignment with their roles. The once transactional relationships between managers and their teams evolved into partnerships founded on mutual respect, understanding, and shared purpose.

Emma's journey had revealed a fundamental truth: the retention of star performers was intricately tied to the quality of leadership they experienced daily. By focusing on the development of her managers, Emma had not only stemmed the tide of departures but had also ignited a cultural shift that promised to propel the company to new heights of innovation and collaboration.

# BREAKTHROUGH #2: BUILDING A MAGNETIC CULTURE

Buoyed by her initial success in redefining the role of managers, Emma embarked on the next phase of her journey: cultivating a magnetic culture that would not only retain star performers but also attract new talent. She envisioned a workplace that resonated with energy, creativity, and a profound sense of belonging, where every employee felt an integral part of something extraordinary.

Emma knew that to build this vibrant culture, she needed to weave the values of innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration into the very fabric of the organization. She started by organizing a series of workshops that brought together employees from all levels and departments, fostering a dialogue about the company's core values and how they could be lived out in daily operations.

Through these collaborative sessions, a shared vision began to emerge, one that celebrated diversity of thought and encouraged every individual to contribute their unique ideas and perspectives. Emma and her team worked tirelessly to break down the silos that had long segmented the workforce, promoting cross-functional teams and projects that leveraged the diverse skills and insights of their star performers.

As this culture of inclusivity and collaboration took root, Emma turned her attention to innovation. She introduced 'Innovation Fridays,' a day dedicated each month to exploring new ideas, experimenting with different approaches, and taking calculated risks. These sessions became a breeding ground for creativity, with teams pitching their projects to leadership and the most promising ideas receiving funding and support to be developed further.

The shift towards a more dynamic and participative culture was palpable. Employees began to feel a renewed sense of engagement and ownership over their work, knowing that their contributions were valued and could lead to tangible changes within the company.

However, Emma understood that for this magnetic culture to truly take hold, it needed to be reflected in every aspect of the company's operations, from

# BUILDING A MAGNETIC CULTURE

recruitment and onboarding to performance management and career development. She worked closely with her team to ensure that the company's values were clearly communicated in job postings, and that the recruitment process was designed to attract individuals who shared these values and could thrive in a collaborative and innovative environment.

The onboarding process was revamped to immerse new hires in the company's culture from day one, with mentorship programs and team-building activities that fostered a sense of community and belonging. Performance reviews were transformed into forward-looking development discussions, focusing on growth opportunities and aligning individual aspirations with the company's strategic goals.

As these cultural changes took effect, the results were remarkable. The company began to attract a new breed of talent, drawn by the promise of working in an environment that valued their ideas and offered endless opportunities for growth. Star performers who had once contemplated leaving were now re-energized, inspired by the positive transformations and the role they could play in shaping the company's future.

Emma's vision of a magnetic culture had become a reality, transforming the company into a beacon of innovation and collaboration in the industry. This vibrant culture not only retained their brightest stars but also attracted new talent, setting the stage for a period of unprecedented growth and success. Emma's journey had taught her that the heart of any organization lies in its people, and by nurturing a culture that celebrates diversity, fosters innovation, and encourages collaboration, she had unlocked the true potential of her team.

# BREAKTHROUGH #3: A FRESH APPROACH TO DEVELOPING MANAGERS

Emma's quest to transform her managers into leaders who inspire loyalty had encountered its share of trials. Traditional workshops and training sessions, she realized, had fallen short of creating the lasting change she envisioned. The managers returned to their roles energized but quickly reverted to old habits amidst the daily grind. The disconnect between the classroom and the realities of the manufacturing floor was too vast.

Determined to find a more effective approach, Emma turned to the 70/20/10 model for learning and development, which posits that 70% of learning comes from on-the-job experiences, 20% from interactions with others, and only 10% from formal educational events. She implemented a year-long leadership development program that would immerse managers in a continuous learning journey, blending online content, personalized coaching, peer group learning, and, most importantly, practical application in their daily roles.

Each month focused on a different leadership skill, starting with reshaping the mindset from reactive to active , moving through effective feedback, delegation, conflict resolution, and culminating in coaching and team development. Online modules provided the foundational knowledge, which was then deepened through coaching sessions where managers could explore the nuances of each skill in the context of their personal challenges and experiences.

Peer learning groups became a cornerstone of the program, offering a space for managers to share insights, successes, and setbacks. These groups fostered a sense of camaraderie and mutual support, breaking down the isolation that many managers felt in their leadership roles. The real transformation, however, occurred on the manufacturing floor, where managers were encouraged to practice their new skills in real-time, turning everyday situations into opportunities for growth and learning.

The impact of this new approach was profound. Star performers began to notice a marked change in their managers' behavior. Where once instructions were given without room for dialogue, there was now an openness to discussion and input.

# A FRESH APPROACH TO DEVELOPING MANAGERS

Feedback sessions transformed from one-sided evaluations to constructive conversations that left employees feeling valued and understood. Managers who had once shied away from conflict now approached difficult conversations with empathy and a focus on resolution, fostering a more harmonious work environment.

Emma's innovative program also addressed the crucial aspect of recognition. Managers learned to identify and celebrate not just the achievements but the effort and progress of their team members, cultivating a culture of appreciation that motivated employees to push their boundaries and contribute their best.

As the months passed, the ripple effects of this leadership transformation were felt throughout the organization. Teams became more cohesive and adaptive, navigating challenges with greater agility and creativity. The trust between managers and their teams deepened, leading to increased engagement and a shared commitment to the company's goals.

The transformation culminated in a renewed sense of loyalty among the star performers, who now felt genuinely supported and empowered by their leaders. They saw their managers not just as supervisors, but as mentors and advocates who were invested in their growth and success.

Emma's bold experiment with the 70/20/10 model had paid off, turning a once-skeptical group of managers into inspirational leaders. This leadership renaissance became the catalyst for a wider cultural shift within the company, laying the foundation for sustained innovation, excellence, and loyalty. Emma's journey had taught her that true change requires patience, persistence, and a willingness to embrace new approaches. By reimagining leadership development, she had ignited a transformation that would propel her company to new heights.



See how we do this

# BREAKTHROUGH #4: GROWTH THAT KEEPS STARS ENGAGED

Emma's journey to transform her company's culture and retain its star performers had already led to significant changes in management style and the cultivation of a magnetic culture. However, she knew that to truly engage and retain her top talent, she needed to address another critical piece of the puzzle: growth opportunities.

Understanding that star performers are often driven by the desire for personal and professional development, Emma set out to create a robust system that would offer these opportunities in abundance. She recognized that growth couldn't be a one-size-fits-all solution; it needed to be as diverse and dynamic as the talent she aimed to nurture.

Emma initiated a comprehensive skills mapping exercise across the company, identifying not only the skills currently in the organization but also those needed for future growth and innovation. This exercise illuminated the pathways for development and highlighted potential areas for cross-functional training and lateral moves that could provide the variety and challenge her star performers craved.

Building on this foundation, Emma launched a "Growth Opportunities Program" designed to align individual aspirations with organizational needs. This program was multifaceted, offering a mix of formal training, mentorship, stretch assignments, and project-based learning. Each star performer was paired with a mentor who not only guided them through their current roles but also helped them envision and plan their future within the company.

To foster a culture of continuous learning, Emma introduced "Innovation Labs," monthly sessions where employees from different departments could collaborate on experimental projects outside their regular responsibilities. These labs became a playground for creativity and innovation, allowing star performers to apply their skills in new contexts and explore areas of interest that went beyond their day-to-day roles.

Emma also recognized the importance of visibility and communication in creating

# GROWTH THAT KEEPS STARS ENGAGED

growth opportunities. She ensured that the successes and learnings from the Innovation Labs were showcased company-wide, celebrating the contributions of the participants and encouraging others to step forward and participate. This visibility not only motivated the star performers but also inspired others in the organization to seek out growth opportunities.

The impact of these initiatives was profound. Employees who had once felt stagnated in their roles now saw a clear pathway for development and advancement. The opportunity to work on diverse projects, to learn from mentors, and to contribute to innovative initiatives rekindled their passion and commitment to the company.

As the Growth Opportunities Program gained momentum, the narrative within the company began to shift. Conversations around the water cooler were no longer about the limitations and frustrations of their roles but about the exciting projects they were working on, the new skills they were acquiring, and the future possibilities that lay ahead.

Emma's strategic focus on growth opportunities had transformed the workplace into a vibrant ecosystem of learning and development. Star performers were no longer looking outside the company for their next challenge; they were finding it right where they were. This shift not only helped retain top talent but also attracted new talent to the company, drawn by the promise of a workplace that genuinely invested in the growth and development of its people.

Through her innovative approach to growth opportunities, Emma had not only solved the puzzle of retaining star performers but had also set her company on a path of sustained innovation and excellence. Her journey had shown that when employees see a future for themselves within a company, their loyalty and commitment know no bounds.

# BREAKTHROUGH #5: RECOGNITION AND REWARDS THAT MATTER

As Emma continued her transformative journey, she turned her focus to a fundamental aspect of employee engagement and retention: recognition and rewards. She knew that her star performers, driven by a deep commitment to excellence, needed to feel truly valued for their contributions. To address this, Emma envisioned a recognition and rewards system that went beyond the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach, aiming for something more personalized, meaningful, and impactful.

Emma embarked on this new chapter by first seeking to understand what types of recognition were most meaningful to her employees. Through surveys and direct conversations, she discovered a rich tapestry of preferences that varied widely among her team members. Some valued public acknowledgment in front of peers, while others preferred private, sincere expressions of appreciation. There were those who thrived on tangible rewards, whereas others found special assignments or professional development opportunities more rewarding.

Armed with these insights, Emma crafted a multifaceted recognition program tailored to the diverse needs and desires of her workforce. She introduced a "Spotlight" initiative, a monthly feature celebrating individual and team achievements across the company's internal platforms. These spotlights not only highlighted the successes but also shared the stories behind the achievements, offering a glimpse into the hard work and creativity involved.

To ensure that recognition was a constant rather than an occasional event, Emma implemented a peer-to-peer recognition system. This platform allowed employees to acknowledge and thank their colleagues for support, collaboration, and exceptional work. This peer recognition became a powerful tool, fostering a culture of appreciation and respect throughout the organization.

Understanding the importance of tangible rewards, Emma also revisited the company's rewards system. She introduced flexible reward options that employees could choose from, including additional time off, professional development courses, tech gadgets, and wellness programs. This flexibility ensured that the rewards were

# RECOGNITION AND REWARDS THAT MATTER

both personal and meaningful, enhancing their value and impact.

Moreover, Emma recognized the importance of tying recognition to the company's core values and strategic goals. She established annual awards for individuals and teams who exemplified these values in their work, linking recognition directly to the broader mission of the company. These awards became highly coveted, not just for the rewards they offered but for the honor and prestige they conferred upon the recipients.

As these new recognition and reward initiatives took root, a remarkable transformation unfolded within the company. The atmosphere buzzed with positive energy, and the level of engagement and motivation soared. Employees felt seen and appreciated, not just for their outcomes but for their effort and dedication. This acknowledgment fueled their drive to innovate, collaborate, and push boundaries, knowing that their contributions would not go unnoticed.

Emma's strategic approach to recognition and rewards had rekindled a sense of pride and belonging among her star performers. They no longer viewed their roles as mere jobs but as integral parts of a vibrant community that valued their unique contributions. This shift not only bolstered retention but also turned her employees into ambassadors for the company, attracting new talent attracted by the company's culture of appreciation and recognition.

Through this chapter of her journey, Emma demonstrated that when recognition and rewards are aligned with the individual needs and values of employees, they can transform a workplace, fostering a culture of appreciation that drives engagement, loyalty, and excellence.

# BREAKTHROUGH #6: BUILDING A FEEDBACK-RICH ENVIRONMENT

In her relentless pursuit of creating a workplace that not only retained star performers but also nurtured their growth and satisfaction, Emma identified a crucial element that needed refinement: feedback. She envisioned a feedback-rich environment that transcended the traditional, often dreaded, annual review process. Emma sought to cultivate a culture where feedback was continuous, constructive, and a catalyst for personal and professional development.

To bring this vision to life, Emma initiated a comprehensive overhaul of the existing feedback mechanisms. She introduced a 360-degree feedback system that encouraged input from peers, subordinates, and supervisors alike, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on each employee's performance and areas for growth. This inclusive approach demystified feedback, transforming it from a top-down evaluation into a communal, supportive dialogue.

Recognizing the importance of timely feedback, Emma implemented regular "Feedback Fridays," dedicated sessions where teams would come together to reflect on the week's achievements and challenges. These sessions were structured to be positive and forward-looking, focusing on lessons learned and opportunities for improvement rather than dwelling on past mistakes. This shift towards a more immediate and ongoing feedback process helped employees adapt and grow in real-time, fostering a dynamic learning environment.

To ensure that feedback was not only frequent but also effective, Emma invested in training programs for all employees, focusing on the art of giving and receiving feedback. This training equipped her team with the skills to communicate constructively, ensuring that feedback was specific, actionable, and delivered with empathy. By elevating the quality of feedback, Emma made these exchanges more meaningful and impactful, encouraging a mindset of continuous improvement.

Emma also leveraged technology to support this feedback-rich culture. She introduced a digital platform that allowed for real-time feedback, both formal and informal. This tool enabled employees to give and receive kudos for a job well done, ask for input on specific projects, and seek advice on overcoming challenges. The

# BUILDING A FEEDBACK-RICH ENVIRONMENT

platform's accessibility ensured that feedback became an integral part of the daily workflow, seamlessly woven into the fabric of the company's operations.

The impact of these initiatives was profound. The fear and apprehension that once surrounded feedback sessions dissipated, replaced by a sense of anticipation and openness. Employees began to view feedback as a gift, an opportunity to learn, grow, and excel in their roles. The culture shifted from one of avoidance and defensiveness to one of curiosity and resilience, where feedback was welcomed and acted upon.

Managers, too, experienced a transformation. They evolved from evaluators to coaches, using feedback sessions to guide their team members, help them set goals, and develop strategies to achieve them. This coaching approach fostered a deeper connection between managers and their teams, built on trust, respect, and a shared commitment to excellence.

As this feedback-rich environment took root, Emma witnessed a remarkable increase in engagement and performance across the company. Star performers felt more supported and understood, knowing that their development was a priority and that their voices were heard. The continuous loop of feedback and improvement propelled the company forward, driving innovation and success.

Emma's journey had shown that a feedback-rich environment is not just about offering critiques or praise but about creating a culture of mutual support, learning, and growth. By reimagining feedback as a cornerstone of the company's culture, Emma had unlocked the potential of her team, fostering a workplace where everyone, from star performers to emerging talents, could thrive and reach their full potential.

# THE FINAL BREAKTHROUGH: FROM OVERWHELMED TO SUPREME WINNER

As the final pages of this transformative journey unfold, we find Emma in a moment of quiet reflection, her thoughts drifting back to the turbulent meeting that set everything in motion. The memory of that day, with its heavy air of frustration and the daunting challenge laid before her by the executive team, seemed like a distant echo now. It was a crucible moment, one that could have marked the downfall of a lesser spirit. Yet, for Emma, it was the catalyst for a remarkable odyssey of change and renewal.

The path Emma chose was not the easiest, nor was it the most conventional. She embarked on a mission to revitalize the very soul of the company, starting with its leaders. The management training program, designed with the 70/20/10 model, was her bold answer to the cries for change. It was more than just a series of workshops or seminars; it was a revolution in how managers connected with their teams, nurtured talent, and led by example.

The impact of this initiative was nothing short of game-changing. Managers transformed into coaches and mentors, fostering environments where feedback was a gift, and growth opportunities were abundant. The ripple effects were felt across the entire organization, with star performers rekindling their passion for their work and their commitment to the company's vision.

The culmination of Emma's efforts was a moment of triumph and recognition that surpassed all expectations. At the annual recognition event, the atmosphere was charged with a sense of anticipation and celebration. The company had not only weathered the storm but emerged stronger, more cohesive, and vibrant than ever before.

When the CEO took the stage, his presence commanded the room. As he began to speak, his words painted a picture of a company on the brink of disaster, saved by the courage, innovation, and unwavering determination of one individual. When he called Emma to the stage, the applause was thunderous, a testament to the respect and admiration she had earned from every corner of the organization.

# FROM OVERWHELMED TO SUPREME WINNER

The award presented to Emma was more than just a symbol of personal achievement; it was a recognition of the profound impact her leadership had on the company's destiny. The CEO's declaration that Emma had "literally saved the business from disaster and ignited a new chapter of growth" was an accolade that resonated deeply, not just with Emma, but with everyone present. It was a shared victory, a testament to the collective journey they had embarked on under Emma's guidance.

As Emma stood there, holding the supreme award, she realized the magnitude of what they had achieved together. The journey had been arduous, filled with challenges and moments of doubt, but the destination was worth every step. The company had not only retained its star performers but had become a magnet for new talent, drawn by the promise of a workplace that truly valued and nurtured its people.

In this moment of reflection, Emma understood that the journey was far from over. The transformation of the company was an ongoing process, a continuous journey toward excellence and innovation. But as she looked out over the faces of her colleagues, her team, her friends, she knew that they were ready for whatever the future held. Together, they had turned the tide, and now, they were poised to write the next chapter in the company's storied history, one filled with promise, growth, and endless possibilities.

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