

## Keeping ‘em sweet

### Introduction

Since the dot com bubble burst contractors have been happy just to have a contract and delighted if it got renewed, even with enforced decreases in rate!

The market is now changing, and contractors who aren't happy will soon be able to walk away from bad projects.

Losing your best contractors can be costly, particularly if it happens in the middle of projects.

Here's some top tips for retaining contractors:

Top tips for retaining Contractors

- o **Pay Market Rate:** Pay market rates. Every £5 per hour increase means an extra £400 after tax for a contractor.
- o **Don't Play The Loyalty Card:** Don't expect contractors to be loyal to your business. If you aren't paying market rates then to get loyalty you'll need to buy a dog. One reason contractors left permanent employment was to be their own boss.
- o **Respect:** A contractor expects to be paid the market rate for their services. If you aggressively communicate that the contractor isn't worth it then they'll not be overly impressed and might leave on principal.
- o **Listen to them:** If the project isn't going well and there concerns are not listened to and addressed then no amount of money will stop them bailing out of [losing Olympics project](#).
- o **Throw Biscuits:** The major paranoia for contractors is that their skills become out of date. If you can offer them commercial experience of some new technologies then this might make them stay. You'll retain all their corporate knowledge and gain from them learning new skills and training your in house staff. It can be a good win – win deal. You might need to put it in writing though. Contractors don't work based on promises since they've invariably been burnt from their permie days.
- o **Trust Them:** If you don't think your contractors can be left to get the job done, then why did you hire them? If they let you down, then it's a good job they're only contractors – you can easily get rid of them.
- o **Praise Them:** A kind or generous word can go a very long way with contract and permanent staff alike. It's important for smart, educated professionals to know that their achievements and contributions are being recognised.
- o **Be Flexible:** Some employers can cut off their noses to spite their faces, insisting on always getting their own way. You should note that at least half the time it is a seller's market, and skilled contractors are in short supply. Being flexible about working hours, working from home, taking breaks and sabbaticals, significantly improves your chances of recruiting and retaining the best people. You might be surprised at how flexible and committed they can be in return.
- o **Be Honest:** A common complaint among contractors with high professional standards is that contracts are misrepresented in the recruiting process. If you set unrealistically high expectations about the work they'll be doing – for example, suggesting that they'll be using "cutting edge technology" and then lumbering them with old legacy code for 6 months – then you can expect the best contractors to walk sooner rather than later.
- o **Be Reasonable:** The contract market is rife with tales of consultants being frogmarched from client sites because they looked something up in the book, or because they didn't know every last detail of an API or programming language. If even the best contractors can't live up to your expectations, they will eventually stop trying and go where they'll be more appreciated. Contractors may be very well paid, but even the best occasionally make mistakes or don't have the answers.

The most important thing to remember is that *people* are the biggest factor in the success or failure of an IT project. There's a big difference between the productivity of the best and the worst contractors, and anything you can do to hold on to the best will dramatically increase your project's chances of success.

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