



Retaining Top Hires Playbook



Retaining Top Hires

A Practical Playbook for Directors & Senior Leaders

Why This Playbook Exists

Hiring high-calibre talent is a significant investment.

Yet some strong hires underperform or exit early, not because of their capabilities, but because the environment, clarity, or leadership framework wasn't set up to support them.

This playbook is designed to help directors and senior leaders implement systems to protect their investment in hiring, accelerate performance, and retain top talent over the long term.

The principles outlined are most effective when embedded directly into your hiring, onboarding, and leadership practices, ensuring clarity, accountability, and consistency from the offer acceptance stage through to long-term performance.

You will find suggested action items outlined in the document's checkboxes.

We recommend reviewing your current leadership framework, onboarding process, and retention practices, and implementing any actions that add value to your organisation, systems and processes.

When To Use This Playbook

- ☐ Upon offer acceptance
- ☐ During onboarding design
- ☐ As a 90-day leadership checklist
- ☐ In manager training for hiring and onboarding
- ☐ As a retention audit framework

Retaining Top Hires

1. Retention Starts Before Day One.

Strong retention begins before the offer is accepted, not after the hire starts.

Top performers don't commit solely on the basis of job titles or compensation. They commit when they sense clarity and confidence in the role from the hiring manager, leadership team, and alignment with the business's direction.

What effective leaders do:

- ☐ Clearly articulate why the role exists and why it matters to the business
- ☐ Define success upfront, outlining what "good" looks like in the first 90 days, 6 and 12 months
- ☐ Align internally before presenting the offer, ensuring all decision-makers share the same expectations
- ☐ Sell the role honestly, including constraints, challenges, and what will not change in the short term
- ☐ Set the tone for accountability and trust, signalling that performance, not politics, will be rewarded

Why it matters:

- When expectations are vague or overly optimistic, even strong hires disengage.
- When expectations are clear and credible, top performers lean in.

Outcome:

The new hire joins with realistic expectations, strong confidence in leadership, and a clear understanding of expectations and how they can create impact and results, significantly increasing early engagement and long-term commitment.

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2. The First 30 Days.

The first month sets the tone both emotionally and commercially.

This is when new hires decide whether they've made the right move, how much discretionary effort to apply, and how confident they feel operating within the business.

Momentum gained (or lost) in this window is difficult to recover later.

High-performing organisations treat the first 30 days as a deliberate onboarding phase, not an administrative one.

What high-performing organisations ensure

- ☐ Clear – Day 1 communication, including the purpose of the role, immediate priorities, key stakeholders, and a sense of how decisions are made.
- ☐ Immediate access to the systems, tools, information, and decision-makers required to perform the role effectively
- ☐ Regular, structured check-ins, with weekly meetings as a minimum, to provide direction, feedback, and alignment
- ☐ A visible signal that the role matters, through leadership attention, clarity of authority, and inclusion in relevant conversations

What to avoid:

- “Sink or swim” mentalities that undermine confidence and performance
- Delays in system access, information, or approvals that create early frustration
- Vague, shifting, or inconsistent direction from multiple stakeholders

Why it matters:

- Top performers want to make an impact quickly.
- When early friction goes unresolved, energy is spent navigating obstacles rather than creating value.

Outcome:

The hire builds early confidence, gains momentum, and feels supported and trusted, setting a strong foundation for sustained performance and engagement.

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3. Define Success Early — Then Measure It.

Top performers want to know how they are winning.

Without clear success measures, even capable hires become uncertain, misaligned, or frustrated.

Defining success early creates focus, confidence, and momentum and removes ambiguity from performance conversations later.

High-performing organisations treat success measures as a shared agreement, not a moving target.

Best practice

- ☐ Agree on 3–5 measurable outcomes to be achieved for the first 6–12 months
- ☐ Focus on impact, prioritising results that move the business forward rather than volume of effort
- ☐ Clarify what “good” looks like early, so the hire can self-manage and course-correct
- ☐ Review progress regularly, using structured check-ins rather than ad-hoc feedback
- ☐ Adjust expectations as context evolves, while keeping accountability clear and consistent

Why it matters:

- When success is vague, performance becomes subjective.
- When success is defined, performance becomes measurable and manageable.

Clear outcomes reduce friction, improve decision-making, and strengthen trust between leaders and top hires.

Outcome:

The hire operates with clear accountability, understands how their performance is measured, and remains aligned to business priorities, driving sustained performance and engagement over time.

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4. Build the Manager Hire Relationship Intentionally.

Most resignations don't stem from pay, workload, or title; they trace back to a breakdown in the manager-hire communication & relationship.

This relationship is the primary lens through which a new hire experiences the organisation.

Strong leaders consistently:

- ☐ Schedule non-negotiable 1:1s (weekly in the first 90 days, then at least fortnightly) to create psychological safety and continuity
- ☐ Provide direct, timely feedback, reinforcing what "good" looks like and correcting issues before habits form
- ☐ Listen actively to concerns, questions, and signals of misalignment rather than waiting for formal reviews
- ☐ Remove ambiguity around priorities, decision rights, and success measures
- ☐ Address friction early; small tensions compound quickly if ignored, particularly in the first 3–6 months

What this avoids:

- Silent frustration
- Assumption-based management
- "I didn't know that was expected" outcomes
- Passive disengagement before resignation

Clear outcomes reduce friction, improve decision-making, and strengthen trust between leaders and top hires.

Outcome:

A foundation of trust, clarity, and alignment, leading to faster ramp-up, stronger performance, and genuine discretionary effort.

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5. Remove Friction.

Top performers expect pressure, accountability, and high standards, but they do not tolerate unnecessary friction.

When capable people slow down, disengage, or leave, it's rarely due to a lack of effort or competence. It's friction.

Friction quietly drains momentum, confidence, and goodwill if left unresolved.

Common friction points include:

- Unclear authority or decision rights: "Who actually owns this?"
- Internal politics or misaligned stakeholders
- Broken or inconsistent processes that force workarounds
- Conflicting priorities with no clear trade-off decisions

Left unaddressed, these create frustration, second-guessing, and wasted energy, especially for high performers who value autonomy and progress.

Effective leaders take proactive action:

- ☐ Ask directly and regularly: "What's slowing you down right now?"
- ☐ Listen without defensiveness: friction is a system problem, not a complaint
- ☐ Fix what can be fixed quickly, especially blockers within the leader's control
- ☐ Clearly explain constraints when issues can't be resolved immediately, including what will change and when

What this signals to top talent:

- Their time is respected
- Performance matters more than politics
- Leadership is accountable, not distant

Outcome:

Energy remains directed toward outcomes and execution, not frustration, workarounds, or disengagement.

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6. Create Early Wins

Momentum is one of the most underestimated drivers of retention and performance. Early progress builds belief not just for the new hire, but for the broader organisation around them.

Strong organisations engineer early wins rather than leaving them to chance.

How high-performing teams do this:

- ☐ Identify one achievable, visible win within the first 60–90 days, something meaningful but realistic, given ramp-up time
- ☐ Ensure the win is visible to key stakeholders, not buried in day-to-day execution
- ☐ Publicly recognise progress, reinforcing confidence and signalling that the hire was the right decision
- ☐ Explicitly tie the win back to the purpose of the role and the outcomes the organisation hired for

Early wins are not about lowering the bar — they’re about sequencing success. They create clarity on what “good” looks like and accelerate trust in capability.

What this avoids:

- Long periods of invisible effort
- Premature judgment from peers or leadership
- Self-doubt in otherwise capable hires

Why it matters:

The first 90 days shape belief and commitment. Early visible success builds confidence, signals belonging, and protects your hiring investment before doubt or disengagement can take hold.

Outcome:

Credibility, confidence, and internal buy-in create a platform for sustained performance and long-term retention.

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7. Pay Attention to the 3–6 Month Window.

This is the most overlooked phase of a new hire's lifecycle.

By three to six months in, the initial enthusiasm has worn off. The hire now understands the realities of the role, the culture, internal dynamics, and constraints.

This is where expectations collide with day-to-day execution and where many regretted resignations quietly begin.

High-performing leaders intentionally slow down and re-engage at this point. They:

- ☐ Revisit role alignment — confirming the role still matches the hire's strengths, motivations, and the commercial needs of the business
- ☐ Reconfirm priorities — cutting through scope creep, conflicting requests, and noise that has accumulated since day one
- ☐ Ask directly: "Is this what you expected?" — and create psychological safety for an honest answer
- ☐ Surface friction early — including resource gaps, decision bottlenecks, stakeholder tension, or unclear authority
- ☐ Adjust scope, support, or direction where needed, rather than assuming "they'll figure it out"

What strong leaders understand:

Most disengagement doesn't come from a single event. It comes from unresolved misalignment that compounds quietly over time.

Outcome:

Issues are addressed while energy, trust, and goodwill are still high, preventing disengagement, protecting performance, and reinforcing the message that the organisation is invested in the person, not just the position.

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8. Recognise Impact, Not Just Effort

Recognise Impact, Not Just Effort. Effort is expected. Impact is what top performers care about.

High performers are driven by contribution and results; they want to know their work matters.

Generic praise or blanket recognition quickly loses meaning if it isn't tied to real outcomes.

What sustains motivation is a clear acknowledgement of impact and how it advances the business.

Best-practice leaders are deliberate and specific in how they recognise contribution. They:

- ☐ Acknowledge results publicly — reinforcing what “good” looks like and setting clear performance benchmarks for others
- ☐ Link individual outcomes to business performance — revenue growth, margin improvement, customer retention, risk reduction, or operational efficiency
- ☐ Be precise in recognition — naming the behaviour, decision, or action that led to the result, rather than offering vague praise
- ☐ Recognise progress as well as wins — especially when momentum is being built toward a larger commercial outcome
- ☐ Match recognition to the individual — understanding whether someone values public acknowledgement, private feedback, increased responsibility, or future opportunity

What strong leaders understand:

Recognition isn't about ego. It's about reinforcing the behaviours and outcomes the business wants more of.

When people can clearly see how their contribution connects to performance, they stay engaged, raise their standards, and take greater ownership of results.

Outcome:

Sustained motivation, higher engagement, and a culture where performance is visible, valued, and intentionally repeated.

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9. Invest in Development, Not Just Output

High performers don't leave because they're challenged — they leave because they're stagnant.

While output matters, retention improves dramatically when people can clearly see how today's role connects to tomorrow's opportunity.

Development signals intent: "We're building something with you, not just extracting results."

Effective leaders make development a visible, ongoing conversation. They:

- ☐ Discuss career trajectory early — not as a promise, but as a directional conversation about growth, progression, and optional pathways
- ☐ Clarify what "progress" actually looks like — skills to be built, capabilities to strengthen, behaviours to demonstrate, and outcomes that unlock the next step
- ☐ Create stretch opportunities — ownership of a new account, project leadership, mentoring juniors, or exposure to senior stakeholders
- ☐ Provide access to learning — formal training, industry education, peer learning, or coaching aligned to the role's future demands
- ☐ Increase exposure, not just responsibility — inviting high performers into broader commercial, strategic, or customer conversations

What strong organisations understand:

Development is a retention lever and a performance multiplier. People who are growing apply more discretionary effort, solve problems faster, and take greater ownership of outcomes.

Outcome:

Longer tenure, deeper loyalty, stronger internal capability — and a bench of future leaders who choose to stay because they can see a path forward.

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10. Monitor Retention Risk Signals

The highest-cost hiring failures rarely happen suddenly; they develop quietly through small, accumulating signals.

High-performing leaders actively monitor early behavioural shifts as indicators of retention risk, not as performance issues.

Common risk signals include:

- Declining engagement after month two
- Reduced initiative and ownership
- Avoidance of key stakeholders
- Frustration with authority, process, or decision flow
- Withdrawal from development and future conversations
- Quiet market re-engagement

Leadership action:

- ☐ Surface observations early and directly, without accusation
- ☐ Revisit role alignment, priorities, and expectations
- ☐ Remove friction and clarify authority and decision rights
- ☐ Reconfirm development pathways and future opportunity

Why it matters:

When risk signals are identified and addressed early, leaders protect performance, preserve goodwill, and often re-engage high performers before disengagement becomes irreversible.

Outcome:

Lower attrition, stronger retention of top talent, and reduced hiring risk over the first 6–12 months.

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Final Thoughts.

Hiring great people is hard. Losing them early is avoidable. Retention isn't driven by perks or policies; it's driven by clarity, leadership, and intent.

This playbook exists to help you protect your hiring investment and realise its full return.

Feel free to implement these suggestions into your leadership framework, onboarding process, and retention practices

About Amplified People

Amplified People is a specialist recruitment partner focused on sales, marketing, and commercial roles across the building products, construction, and manufacturing sectors.

We work closely with directors and leadership teams to ensure hiring decisions translate into long-term performance, not just short-term placement success.