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## Treasure Teams: How to Retain Supermarket Bakery Talent

Consistency in the bakery department shouldn't just apply to products—retaining talented staff is an equally important part of a successful department.

Unfortunately, the industry is far from achieving ideal retention rates. **Progressive Grocer** reports grocery retail turnover was 60 percent in 2016, higher than the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 55 percent estimate for the general retail industry. The trade publication attributes the high rate, in part, to a lack of training and development.

Given the specific skills supermarket staff—and in-store bakery employees in particular—need, replacing workers can be challenging and expensive. A **Center for American Progress** study found the turnover cost for workers who make less than \$30,00 annually is roughly 16 percent of their salary.

"It's challenging; there's a lot of competition out there," says Eric Richard, education coordinator for the **International Dairy Deli Bakery Association**. "Some retailers do a really good job of encouraging and retaining talent. It has to do with bringing in talented professionals and building on their skills—giving them the tools they need to succeed."

In today's tight talent market, bakery managers need to make a concerted effort to retain employees. Following these best practices can help keep talent in the department.

### Offer Skill-Building Opportunities

Employees stay engaged when they're learning new skills. Many bakeries use supervisors or seasoned employees to teach team members new proficiencies on an ongoing basis. Employees can also shadow each other to learn new skills. Others get outside assistance from a contractor or industry organization or a supplier. IDDBA, for example, offers training videos and other educational resources.

**Nature's Food Patch** in Clearwater, Florida, occasionally hires instructors to teach on-site cooking classes; employees can attend and be paid for their time.

In addition, the grocery chain is expanding its **talent development** with a new online training program called Patch University. The first course centers on customer service. "It's a way for employees to sit down, log in and go through a particular lesson that's assigned to them," says Dara Scholtz, human resources manager for the store. "The more tools you can provide workers, the more successfully your department is going to run."



### Provide A Career Path

Stores with multiple locations can provide bakery employees a chance to work toward a new role.

**United Supermarkets'** managerial training includes general business knowledge, so after completion, enrolled employees may assume a role in a different department, according to Mark Hughes, bakery manager at one of the Texas chain's Lubbock locations.

"There is a top-out in every position you do—whether it is a lead decorator or head baker; the next step would be to move to being an assistant or operations manager," Hughes says. "My knowledge in the bakery is about running the operation; that's what being an assistant and store director would [involve]. There are a lot of steps I can move into."

Every six months, Nature's Food Patch employees have performance reviews, which can help management assess their goals and proficiencies.

"It's easier to promote someone from within because you've got a person who already knows the store, the products," Scholtz says. "And it really helps employees feel like they are growing with the company and shows other employees it's something that's possible."

### Step Up Benefits

For in-store bakeries competing for **talent** with smaller artisanal and wholesale bakeries, it's important to keep employees happy through benefits and company culture.

One way to become a standout employer? Offer full-time positions, which are dwindling in the industry. This year, in-store bakeries employed an average 4.3 full-time employees, down from 5.8 in 2016, according to Progressive Grocer.

*"If you take care of people, you're going to get a better product."*

*—Dara Scholtz, human resources manager, Nature's Food Patch*

Although Nature's Food Patch provides a number of benefits, including profit sharing, a 401(k) plan, subsidized medical benefits and a 25 percent store discount, Scholtz says the store's 40-hour workweek is one of its biggest retention aids.

"When interviewing, I've noticed there were so many good, talented people who had spent five to six years at a place and still weren't full time," she says. "Our philosophy is if you take care of people, you're going to get a better product. We have only probably five part-time people; and that's because they want to be."

For bakery managers who can't offer full-time jobs or benefits, focus on providing a positive workplace, where employees respect and can learn from each other and feel excited about their future with the company.

"Stores that do a good job of providing an awesome working environment that's supportive and welcoming, that really encourages employees to grow to their potential within the department—that's probably the best way to keep people engaged and enjoying their jobs," Richard says.

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