

Are Your Network Technicians Happy?

BY JOHN E. JOHNSTON

Network administrators and technicians can be difficult to manage. In order to effectively manage network technicians you must take time to understand their way of thinking and see the world through their eyes. Take a look at some of the more common traits of the network technician:

- ◆ they take great pride in their work
- ◆ they enjoy exploring and implementing new technology
- ◆ they become bored with old technology very quickly
- ◆ they like to be involved in the decision-making process
- ◆ they have a type "A" personality
- ◆ they abhor laziness
- ◆ they take responsibility for their actions and decisions

We must keep these traits in mind as we explore ways to keep these technicians happy and motivated. Let's face it, your network technicians have some very marketable skills, and losing a key technician can seriously affect the goals of your organization.

This month, I have developed a checklist of some common areas that managers of network technicians can address to help retain their key technicians. All of the items in this checklist are hot buttons for most network technicians. If you can answer "Yes" to most of these items, chances are that your network technicians will be around for the foreseeable future.

Yes No Do your technicians get paid for being on call?

Yes No Do you allow your technicians to attend formal education classes?

If your technicians have fallen into the trap of "just keeping things running," remember this personality trait that most technicians have in common: they bore easily with old technology.

Yes No Does your help desk shield your technicians from most of the day-to-day problems?

Yes No Do you provide a method for your technicians to dial into the network?

Yes No Do your technicians have access to the Internet?

Yes No Does your organization help your technicians obtain technical certification (Certified NetWare Engineer [CNE] or Microsoft Certification)?

Yes No Are your technicians involved with leading-edge technology such as intranet implementation?

Yes No Do you allow your technicians to have sound cards in their workstations?

Yes No Do you allow your technicians to have CD-ROM drives in their workstations?

Yes No Do you provide two PCs for your technicians (one for production and one for testing new concepts)?

Yes No Do you provide a test lab for your technicians?

Yes No Do you have a separate group to maintain users workstations, allowing your network technicians to concentrate on the back-end components?

Yes No Are your network technicians shielded from correcting most applications software issues?

Yes No Do you provide a laptop for each technician to use at home?

Yes No Are your technicians involved in the decision-making process?

Yes No Do you allow your technicians to attend at least one conference a year?

Yes No Do your technicians receive competitive salaries?

Yes No When your technicians work late or over the weekend, does the organization foot the bill for lunch and dinner?

Yes No Does your organization contribute to the technician's 401K?

Yes No Do you provide adequate comp time (or pay) for night and weekend work?


One of the most common burdens that managers place on their network technicians is that they allow the entire IS department to lean on them because of their technical expertise. For example, many senior-level technicians are routinely called upon to solve such minor issues as the following:

- ◆ printers not printing
- ◆ minor application software problems
- ◆ workstation setups and configurations
- ◆ minor application installations
- ◆ moving PCs from one location to another
- ◆ user setups
- ◆ password changes
- ◆ word processing problems

By requiring your senior technicians to take care of these day-to-day operational issues, you will quickly find that they are spending their entire day just keeping things running. Their time could be better spent concentrating on maintaining and expanding the network infrastructure to move the organization forward. If your technicians have fallen into the trap of “just keeping things running,” remember this personality trait that most technicians have in common: They bore easily with old technology. When a technician is forced to spend the majority of his time supporting the network, the next call he gets from a headhunter may be warmly received.

So, what is a manager to do in order to keep these technicians happy and motivated while still ensuring that the day-to-day problems are addressed? Use the technician’s expertise to train your help desk and

applications personnel. Give your help desk the tools, training and resources they need so that they can handle the day-to-day operations of the network. Once you have done this, go through the checklist above and try to change some of your “No’s” into “Yes’s.”

If you have any questions, comments or ideas for future topics for this column feel free to contact me at johnj@fast.net. 



NaSPA member John E. Johnston is manager of technical support and communications for a major hospital in Pennsylvania. He designs and maintains cross-platform local and wide area networks utilizing NetWare, OS/2, DOS, and Windows.

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