



TOPIC: HUMAN RESOURCES

## CREATIVE WAYS FOR BREWERIES TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TALENT

🕒 7 min read

Unique job perks, such as free beer, are enticing benefits for employees who work at breweries. But gone are the days when brewery managers could advertise, “Now Hiring. Free Beer!” and feel assured they would get a large pool of candidates. In today’s world, it takes more than just free beer to recruit and retain talent.

A large percentage of employees in today’s job market are on the lookout for their next new opportunity. A recent Gallup survey reported that 63% of employees believe it was “very likely” or “somewhat likely” that they could replace the job they have, and 51% were actively seeking a new job. <sup>(1,2)</sup> This challenging labor market is not just a problem for the brewing industry alone – it is boiling over across all industries, causing talent shortages and an urgent need to get qualified personnel.

Brewers will most likely agree that a boil over is not desirable while brewing beer. Yet let’s consider the boiling stage for a second. During this stage of brewing, exciting things are happening – it’s also the point at which the hops are added to create more flavor in the beer.

So how can brewery owners and hiring managers create more flavor to both attract new hires and retain top? Here are some options to consider.

**Welcome new employees with a successful onboarding experience.** First impressions are meaningful, and the onboarding stage is that first impression, the time for your new employee to gain insight into your culture and your company. Does your brewery have a formal onboarding program in place?

Per a Gallup survey cited in a recent Harvard Business Review article, it was reported that “only 12% of employees feel their company does a good job onboarding team members.”<sup>(3)</sup> This means that the other **88% of employees** feel their companies do not have good onboarding programs. There’s lots of room for improvement in this category.

Consider the little ways to make improvements. Onboarding may mean having to complete some time-consuming new hire paperwork, but what if that paperwork was given to the employee along with a customized gift bag of brewery-branded items, such as a hat, a t-shirt and a keychain for the employee to take home after their first day of work at their new company? Or if that paperwork was paired with a guidebook that shares the brewery’s story, its mission, and some fun facts that only insiders would know about the beer or the team of people who work there?

Perhaps there are some mandatory online training videos to help the new employee get up to speed on company practices. Breaking up those online trainings with in-person interactions will ensure the employee is truly made to feel welcome. That can be as simple as hosting an informal team lunch or even a short 15- minute coffee break meetup. Or it can be more formalized via a brewery tour and dedicated time spent shadowing team members in each division (e.g. packaging, warehouse, brewing, sales, marketing) to introduce the new hire to others at the brewery and teach them about how each brewery area works.

By having a planned onboarding schedule, you can eliminate the feeling of those awkward, uncomfortable first days on the job and positively showcase your company’s culture, practices, and team. The process to retain talent starts on day one.

**Design fun, engaging training initiatives.** A recent article in the Society for Human Resource Management discussed the concept of what’s now often coined as the Great Resignation – the economic trend of the 2020-2021 period beginning with the COVID pandemic and followed by employees resigning voluntarily from jobs – and how HR departments are finding ways to solve the challenge, mainly by “improving the employee experience – specifically, their career and skills development.”<sup>(4)</sup>

Breweries have unique opportunities that other industries don’t – the opportunity to combine the words of *beer* and *education* into one phrase, to build programs that won’t make employees feel like they are being forced into a boring, count-down-the-minutes-until-it’s-over training session.

Consider designing a written program that educates employees on a newly released beer style and connects teams cross-functionally across divisions. Design handouts on the history of that beer style, organize blind tasting sheets and talking points to stress the learning objectives for the training. Determine how you will ensure the training is effective and/or can be improved upon in the future, such as through employee surveys and short quizzes to evaluate your staff’s knowledge. There are multiple tools available online to build these, such as SurveyMonkey’s platform ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) and ClassMarker ([www.classmarker.com](http://www.classmarker.com)) for online knowledge testing.

Initiatives like those above are also cost-effective. They can be implemented whether you have 20 employees or 500 employees. The primary cost is investing the time to plan, develop and maintain the programs.

Alternatively, consider taking part in programs that will not cost much time to set up, ones that are already established, such as the Cicerone® Certification Program, which trains employees on beer service, styles and important technical elements of the brewing process<sup>(5)</sup>. Passing the first level, the Certified Beer Server, is a cost of USD \$69 and the test is administered online. Why not reimburse the cost to employees who want to study and improve their knowledge of beer?

Programs like this are especially important for front-of-house employees at taprooms and brewpubs, the people who represent the face of your brewery. This is the guest's first impression that will shape the way they see your brewery and your beer. And the benefit is two-fold; it has the potential to improve both the employee experience as well as the overall guest experience at your brewpub/taproom.

**Foster a team culture by incorporating a mentorship model.** A mentorship program can help a new employee connect with others and get support from day one. A mentor can also gain insight into how the new employee is adapting and answer any questions/concerns along the way.

"I believe that the practice of mentorship boils down to a conversation with someone with lived experiences that supports one's goals," says Chris Motley, CEO of Mentor Spaces. <sup>(6)</sup> It's easy to zone in on just your specific focus area at the brewery, but these lived experiences are equally important to get a glimpse of the whole picture. The packaging team may not regularly interact with the sales team, or the warehouse manager may not have the opportunity to speak with marketing and the sales team. By pairing a mentor and mentee who work in different functional areas, such as a packaging manager with a marketing brand ambassador, each person can obtain a better understanding of one another's jobs, how that job affects his/her(s) own job, and how each of the departments can come together cohesively to create success.

**Develop some memorable perks that align with your brand image.** Perhaps your brewery's brand is focused on an adventure lifestyle – mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing, etc. Think of ways you can design perks that reflect your brand image, such as partnering with the local bike shop to offer discounts to your employees, or perhaps offering a gift certificate towards the purchase of a bike after the employee has been with the company for a year. The options are limitless. It just takes some brainstorming sessions across teams to develop and then implement.

The brewing industry is exciting and fun, but ultimately, it's also a business that requires a business-minded approach – that includes developed, organized programs focused on recruitment and retention.

Help ensure that the 51% of employees that are actively seeking a new job in today's labor market are not part of your current team of talented employees. Human Resource initiatives have the power to strengthen and reshape your culture. It just takes a little time.

*By Tanya Birch, Senior Advisor, Human Resources, First Key Consulting*

References:

<sup>1</sup>Forbes, March 2022. Found in: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2022/03/07/employee-benefits-versus-moments-that-matter/?sh=25229875201e>

<sup>2</sup>Gallup. State of the American Workplace report. Found in: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/323573/employee-experience-and-workplace-culture.aspx#ite-323717>

<sup>3</sup>Harvard Business Review, April 2022. Found in: <https://hbr.org/2022/04/onboarding-can-make-or-break-a-new-hires-experience>

<sup>4</sup>Society for Human Resource Management. Found in: [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org) Resources articles/Organizational & Employee Development. Consider signing up for membership to join to get full articles and useful HR information.

<sup>5</sup>Cicerone Certification Program. For more information, please go to [www.cicerone.org](http://www.cicerone.org)

<sup>6</sup>Forbes, January 2022. Found in: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2022/01/18/why-a-mentorship-program-can-help-your-organization-win-the-war-for-talent/?sh=7eb18da61c86>

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