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L.I.-based P.W. Grosser Consulting: Playing the retention game in a

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Rising health-care premiums hit most workers hard, but employees at P.W. Grosser Consulting have been blissfully immune.

The Bohemia-based environmental engineering firm pays 100 percent of coverage for its workers. Human Resources Director Deanna M. Lantieri said because of this, employees are happier - and more likely to stay with a firm that lost only two of 50 employees in 2006.

"They're extremely loyal and appreciative," Lantieri said. "I have more people than we need that would love to work here."

P.W. Grosser Chief Operating Officer Frank Castellano agreed that better benefits give his firm an edge in the highly competitive engineering industry. "We do have a lower turnover than some of our competitors," he said. "There's a whole culture of the organization that is the drive behind retention."

Faced with employee shortages and low unemployment rates, many companies are focusing on retaining staff. It saves money by averting lost productivity due to vacancies and new-hire training, according to George Snider, a spokesman at Hauppauge-based recruiting firm Sanford Rose Associates.

"Hiring is never cheap and, when demand exceeds supply, it isn't easy," Snider noted.

While you might expect good paychecks and free health care alone to retain staff, Sanford Rose Managing Partner Phil Bilello said longevity is about more than good pay and benefits. "Most people today are concerned with job satisfaction beyond money and health care," he said.

Job security, a clear sense of direction, growth path and a pleasant

environment are all keys to keeping good people. "You would be surprised how what you may consider as insignificant items may affect people's attitudes," Bilello said.

Andrew S. Hazen, chief executive of search engine marketing firm Prime Visibility in Bohemia, agreed the little things go far in helping to retain staff. Hazen's employees who rise above expectations receive gifts such as portable DVD players, iPods, cappuccino makers, tents or digital cameras, while free breakfasts on Friday help all employees feel at home.

Companies that retain employees often create an environment where employees can advance. Bob Chanin, director of human resources for Farmingdale-based professional employer organization The Alcott Group, said most employees want to learn on the job.

"The workforce of today is in a big hurry," Chanin said. "You want to have them start to take on additional responsibilities. Diversify their work."

Cutting through red tape also can keep employees happy. P.W. Grosser shifted to general paid time off rather than separate allotments of vacation, sick and personal days.

"It's treating employees as mature adults," Lantieri noted. "Nobody has to call in sick and fake their cough. What you do with [days off] is not management's business."

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