

The Talent Retention Playbook: Leadership Strategies for Government Agencies



How to Address Burnout, Boost Engagement, and Retain Top Talent in Public Service

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Addressing the Talent Retention Crisis

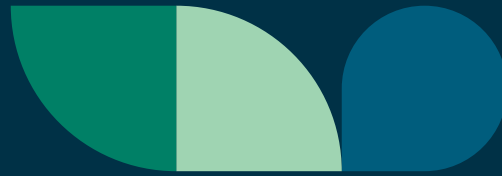
Government agencies are saddled with numerous mission-critical challenges: burnout rates higher than the corporate sector, a disengaged workforce, and high turnover, to name a few.

Left unchecked, these challenges slowly sap an agency's ability to meet the needs of its constituents. Hundreds of agencies across the country face this unfortunate situation.

This eBook explores:

- The most critical challenges in talent retention
- Leadership strategies to reduce burnout and disengagement
- Actionable solutions to improve workforce motivation





*Hundreds of agencies across
the country are struggling with
burnout and disengagement.*

*Leaders have the power
to change that.*

Identifying and Addressing the Root Causes of Burnout

Employee burnout is an urgent issue for state and local agencies. Government workers are more likely to feel burned out compared to those working in the private sector **(65% vs. 44%)**.

Chronic understaffing aggravates workload issues at agencies. Record employee attrition and lengthy hiring processes to replace people mean too few hands for too much work. As a result, government workers experience significant stress.

Key Causes of Government Employee Burnout:

- Unsustainable workload
- Little feedback from leaders
- Poor work/life balance
- Unclear communication in the workplace

The Fallout of Burnout



71%

Job performance drops

57%

Willingness to go above and beyond declines

41%

Increased absenteeism

33%

Strained workplace relationships



“People often focus on burnout as an individual issue rather than a social or communal organizational issue.”

— Christina Maslach

Expert Insight:

In a recent interview for [Blanchard’s LeaderChat podcast](#), Christina Maslach, co-author of *The Burnout Challenge*, explains that addressing burnout issues means talking about better matches between people and their jobs. “It’s more of a *we* problem, not just an individual *me* problem.”

Maslach says that when you frame the question in terms of only the individual and their situation, you’re not asking questions about what’s in the job environment that is creating chronic stressors.

Maslach explains that there’s been a tendency to focus on helping the individual cope, which is fine, but that leaves out the other part of how to prevent burnout from occurring in the first place. It requires a broader focus, beyond the individual.

To improve organizational work environments, Maslach recommends:

- **Collaboration**
Identifying and addressing job stressors together
- **Regular communication**
Leaders must ask: What issues are employees facing?
How do we address them?

Addressing burnout isn’t just about reducing workloads—it’s about how leaders engage, support, and develop their teams. The next section explores how strong leadership directly impacts engagement and retention.



*A leader has as much influence
on an employee as their doctor,
therapist, or spouse.*

The Power of Leadership in Employee Engagement

Government leaders have an extraordinary influence on their employees' well-being, engagement, and retention. **70% of team engagement is determined solely by the manager.**

How Leaders Can Prevent Burnout and Boost Engagement:

- ✓ Regular one-on-one meetings (weekly or biweekly)
- ✓ Empathetic listening – Leaders must ask, listen, and act
- ✓ Clear expectations and consistent feedback

Dr. Vicki Halsey, Blanchard vice president of applied learning, adds:

“It’s important to remember that government workers are people first and workers second. Leaders should ask their people how they are really feeling, listen until someone’s finished talking, and try to help.”

Regular one-on-one meetings between leaders and their team members are a valuable way to support people and build relationships. These meetings should be held once a week or at least biweekly. This is an employee’s time to share concerns and challenges.



“Government workers are people first and workers second.”

— Dr. Vicki Halsey


A government-focused white paper by Blanchard, *The Role of Strategic and Operational Leadership Skills: How and When to Use in a Government Setting*, identifies that successful leaders in a government setting:

- **Convey expectations, goals, and feedback effectively to employees.**
- **Demonstrate empathy and emotional intelligence to build strong relationships.**

An empathetic and engaged leader has tremendous influence. They have the power to turn adverse situations into positive ones, which drives retention and engagement. Of course, the opposite also holds true: an unskilled or toxic leader can create an unpleasant environment that drives turnover.

A Blanchard Point of View

blanchard.



The Role of Strategic and Operational Leadership Skills:
How and When to Use in a Government Setting

[Download White paper](#)

Building an Engaged and Motivated Workforce

Government workers are less engaged and less motivated than those in the private sector.

Top Factors Contributing to Disengagement:

- Political transitions that create instability
- Limited career development opportunities
- Unclear leadership and lack of direction

Bob Freytag, senior consulting partner at Blanchard, addresses one unique factor:

“Burnout and retention in government agencies is also driven by elections. A politician gets voted in and another gets voted out. This creates a predictable churn that can be unsettling to many. The rate of change at government agencies can be quite fast, and rapid course corrections can cause people to quit.

“Still, leaders shouldn’t feel that they are at the whim of circumstances. They have an arsenal of tools they can use to meet the moment.”



Blanchard's Employee Work Passion research highlights twelve key drivers of motivation and retention. Leaders who apply these insights can create work environments that foster purpose, trust, and long-term engagement. When looking to create work environments that encourage people to have positive intentions, organizations and leaders should examine the extent to which these factors are present in their current culture.



[Download White paper](#)

How Leaders Can Reignite Motivation:

- **Career Development:**
Provide clear growth paths
- **Transparent Policies & Fair Compensation:**
Foster trust and retention
- **Autonomy & Collaboration:**
Empower employees to own their work

Reflection Questions for Leaders:

- Does the culture help individuals find meaning in their work?
- Are policies, benefits, and compensation fair and transparent?
- Are growth opportunities and feedback effective?
- Are expectations clear with a balance of autonomy and collaboration?
- Are roles reasonable and challenging?



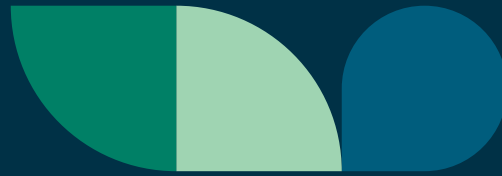
Leadership Techniques for Boosting Team Morale

The good news is that leaders can make a significant difference in their team's performance. Gallup found that **70% of the variance in team engagement is determined solely by the manager.**

Key Strategies:

- Adjust leadership styles based on team needs
- Set clear goals and expectations to align priorities
- Develop strong communication skills to foster trust
- Build and maintain trust through transparency and reliability
- Empower team members to take ownership of their roles

Put simply, a skilled leader can turn a struggling group into a top performing team.



Change isn't just about new policies—it's about people. Leaders who support their teams through change create stronger, more resilient organizations.

Retaining Top Talent During Change and Uncertainty

Change is constant in government agencies—whether it's new leadership, budget cuts, restructuring, or implementing new technology. While these shifts are necessary, they can also create uncertainty, resistance, and disengagement among employees.

Blanchard's Leading People Through Change® program teaches that people experience predictable stages of concern during transitions. Leaders who understand these stages can help their teams process change, reduce resistance, and build engagement.

The Leader's Role in Change

Dr. Vicki Halsey explains:

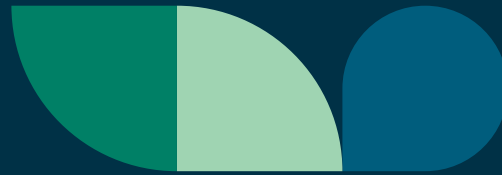
"It is a leader's job to build their people's capacity for change and to manage the meaning of change. It's about being honest in regard to the uncertainties. It is asking people to reflect on how the change will affect them and feel empowered—or at least not negative—about the situation."

How Leaders Can Support Employees During Change:

- ✓ **Engage employees early**
Include them in discussions to foster buy-in
- ✓ **Communicate the 'why'**
Help employees see the bigger picture
- ✓ **Acknowledge concerns**
Listen, validate, and address anxieties
- ✓ **Provide a clear roadmap**
Set expectations and outline steps
- ✓ **Empower employees**
Involve them in decision-making when possible

"When people understand the reason for a change and their role in it, they are far more likely to embrace it."

— Dr. Vicki Halsey



The desire to grow and develop is inherent in us. We feel good about ourselves when we learn something new and use it.

When people see how what they learned translated into positive results, they take pride in their work, team, and organization.

Building a Culture of Continuous Growth and Development

A majority of employees want learning and development opportunities. In government agencies, this need is even more pronounced—employee satisfaction triples when professional development is available.

The key to fostering a culture of learning isn't just offering training programs—it's leadership commitment. Employees look to their leaders to set the tone, and when leaders prioritize development, it becomes embedded in the organization's culture.

The Leader's Role in Growth and Development:

Bob Freytag explains:

"If something is important to a leader, it will be important to their direct reports. Leaders should repeatedly share that learning and development is a priority, and that they will support their people in this pursuit."

When leaders actively encourage professional development, employees feel motivated, engaged, and empowered to grow.





How Leaders Can Foster a Growth Culture:

- **Prioritize development**
Talk about learning as a key to success
- **Lead by example**
Show commitment by pursuing growth yourself
- **Encourage learning opportunities**
Support employees in upskilling
- **Recognize growth efforts**
Celebrate and reward development

Championing a culture of continuous learning is a smart investment that pays significant dividends. It boosts employee engagement, reduces turnover, and creates a more dynamic workplace. It generates an esprit de corps and camaraderie that enhances performance and satisfaction.



There is a
science to this.
It is repeatable and
proven. Knowing
this, our best days
lie ahead!

A Brighter Tomorrow

Government agencies face serious and significant challenges, but there are remedies for all of them. It begins with having inspiring leaders at the helm—people who know how to create meaning, instill pride, and boost engagement in one's work.

The leadership strategies outlined in this eBook provide government leaders with the tools to:

- Address employee burnout by improving workplace conditions
- Strengthen leadership effectiveness through engagement and emotional intelligence
- Increase employee motivation by offering growth opportunities
- Cultivate an environment where people feel valued, trusted, and empowered



With the
right leadership
approach, the future
of government
agencies is
bright!

Final Action Steps for Leaders

To begin implementing these ideas, consider the following:

- **Take immediate action**
Choose one engagement strategy from this eBook and implement it within the next 30 days.
- **Start one-on-one meetings**
Dedicate time each week or biweekly to check in with employees.
- **Evaluate leadership approaches**
Assess whether current leadership styles align with employees' needs and make adjustments as necessary.
- **Invest in professional development**
Ensure employees have access to training, mentorship, and career growth opportunities.

Government agencies exist to serve the public, and their success depends on having a highly engaged and motivated workforce. Leaders who implement these strategies will not only improve retention but will also create a work environment where employees feel valued, supported, and inspired to do their best work.

Take the Next Step in Your Leadership Journey



Facing retention challenges?

Watch our Retain Talent and Boost Engagement Webinar. www.blanchard.com/resources/upcoming-webinars



Want more expert guidance?

Explore Blanchard's research library with case studies for government leaders. <https://resources.blanchard.com/government>



Looking for leadership training?

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