



How to Recruit & Retain a  
New Generation of Hourly Workers:  
Overcoming Resistance to Blue-Collar Careers



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# Executive Summary



## The Blue-Collar Branding Problem

Blue-collar & frontline jobs have a branding problem, especially among younger workers. Many young people associate “jobs” with making a quick buck in the summer and “careers” as exciting, long-term opportunities. They think frontline work is for people without college degrees, while careers offer advancement and continuous learning. *(MRA)*

## Recruiting & Retaining Workers is Harder Than Ever

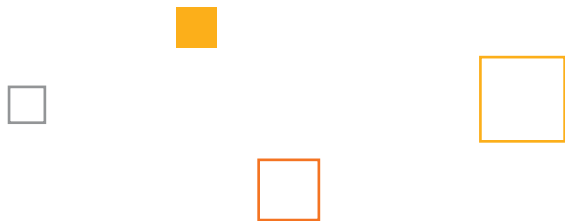
Attracting talent is hard in part because there just aren’t as many workers as there used to be. The working age population in the U.S. is shrinking and baby boomers are retiring. Retaining workers is hard because demand for labor is soaring and supply is scarce, which means workers are far more likely to quit a job they don’t like. *(Conference Board)*

## GEON, a Manufacturer in Cleveland, has Solved the Problem

GEON, a global leader in plastic compounded solutions, faced a challenge in attracting young talent due to industry-wide stereotypes about manufacturing jobs lacking career growth. Alex Ross, GEON’s HR leader, partnered with Paycor to offer a comprehensive approach to talent and career development, anchored in continuous feedback and regular monthly touchpoints between employees and their direct supervisors. This approach flipped the script, inspiring employees to see their jobs as careers that have momentum and purpose, and are aligned to the strategic vision of a company they believe in.

## Here’s How They Did It

GEON followed Paycor’s best practices for coaching, optimizing, and retaining workers—the COR Leadership Framework. In this guide, we’ll walk you through the process.



Coach > Optimize > Retain



# Coach > Optimize > Retain



**DEFINITION:** A coaching approach to leadership focuses on helping an employee **find the sweet spot between their own personal aspirations and the needs of the organization.** Effective coaches help workers discover and refine their strengths and address blind spots and weaknesses.

## Why Coaching Is Important

**Coaching promotes engagement and accountability.** When employees are learning and growing, their day-to-day job responsibilities feel like a path forward and not a dead end.

**60% of employees in organizations with strong coaching cultures rate themselves as “highly engaged”** vs. 48% in organizations that don’t support coaching (TLNT). **94% say they’d stay at a job longer if they had access to career development** (LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report).





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## How to Coach in the Blue-Collar Workplace

“Blue-collar” refers to jobs that require manual labor and may not require a college degree. Today, it’s not uncommon to find blue-collar workers who are highly skilled at performing a certain job function (think manufacturing, trucking, etc.). Many of the COR Leadership principles apply, but there are differences worth noting.

- **Skill attainment is the driving motivation.** Blue-collar workers thrive by learning specific new technical or procedural skills that make them more valuable in the marketplace. Blue-collar work has faced its share of disruption in the past decades, so workers are keen to stay ahead of the curve.



- **Leaders should share their personal stories of career advancement (and skill attainment).** Workers want to know that their managers can “walk the walk.”
- **Co-create employee development plans.** Career plans aren’t just for aspiring managers. Educate team members of what skills they need to acquire to get to the next level. Invite employees to co-create a development plan with their managers so that they feel personally invested.
- **Provide access to the training or mentorship needed to learn new skills.** A company that invests strategically and intentionally in learning programs will attract higher quality blue-collar workers. As Boomers retire, document what they’ve learned over the years and formalize that tribal knowledge into training programs.

#### How to Measure Blue-Collar Manager Effectiveness

- Team members’ skill attainment, progression in roles.
- Goal creation for team members.
- Onboarding experience ratings.
- How employees rate their manager’s trustworthiness.



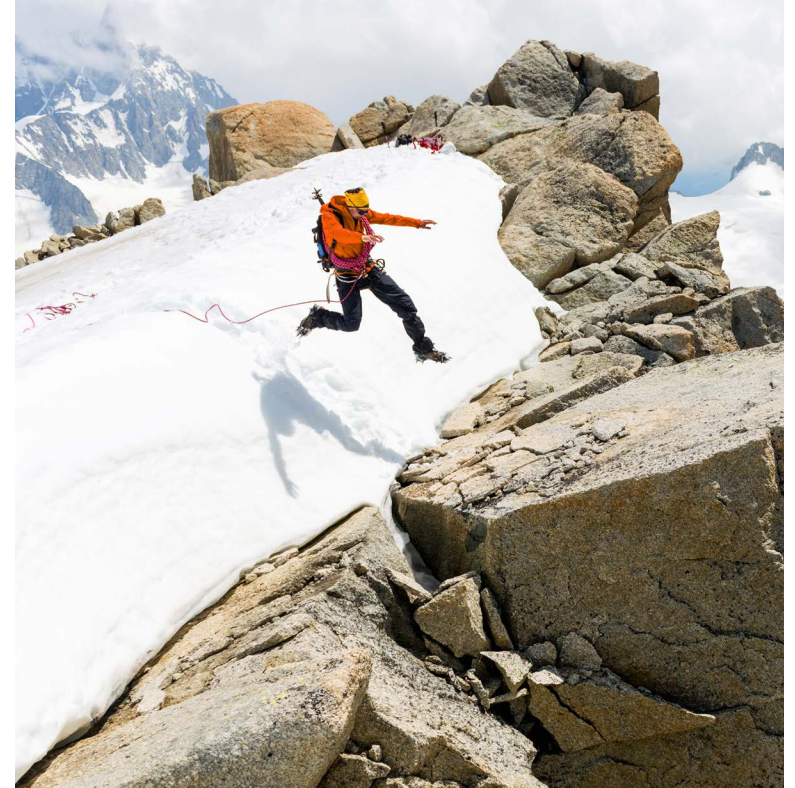
“ We don’t do annual performance reviews. We do continuous feedback, so everyone, at least once a month, has regular touch points with their direct supervisor, and can see how they’re doing, what they need to learn next, how their skills are developing.”

–HR Leader Alex Ross, GEON

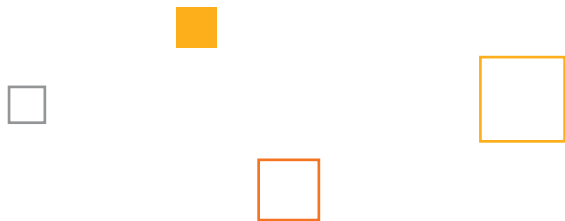


#### How Paycor Helps:

Onboarding, 1:1 tool, Career Management, Leader Homepage, 9-Box, LMS, Paycor Paths, Performance Review Templates Customized for Industry



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**DEFINITION:** To optimize performance, leaders need to balance a **relentless drive to excellence**, without burning people out or micromanaging.

## Why Optimizing Is Important

**Leaders are responsible for the productivity of their teams.** It's what managers are hired to do. And while the company most likely evaluates manager efficacy based on objective results and revenue goals, a lot of what it takes to inspire a team to give it their all is intuitive, as much art as science.

**Optimizing performance is a balancing act.** Effective leaders know how to model accountability without slipping into micromanagement. They know how to encourage and cheer on employees without being a pushover. They lead by example and inspire others to go the extra mile.





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## How to Optimize in the Blue-Collar Workplace

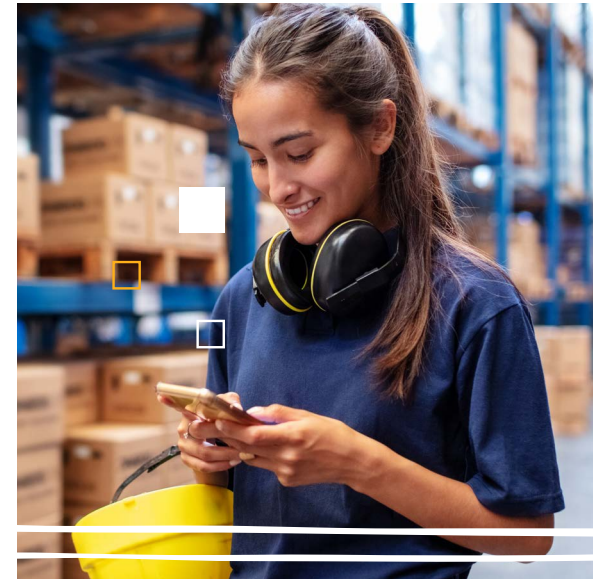
The pandemic hit blue-collar, especially hourly, workers harder than corporate, salaried employees. Many companies closed offices so some employees could work from home, while frontline workers had no choice but to come in for work, often without a safety net of paid sick leave. Leaders need to invest in blue-collar workers to ensure they feel appreciated, supported, and part of the company mission.

- **Give every employee a job description that ties to the company mission.** For example, consider janitorial staff in a manufacturing plant. A janitor's job is integral to the mission of the organization—their efforts keep the factory floor safe, healthy, and clean. A well-kept work environment is also essential to employee morale and the identity of the company.

- **Define success.** In Paycor's surveys of blue-collar workers, we found time and again the same sentiment: "I know what poor performance is, I know what will get me written up, but I don't know what going above and beyond looks like." Leaders of blue-collar teams must shift the conversation away from what not to do and paint a more vivid picture of what individual and team success looks like.
- **Over-communicate the intention of 1:1's.** Many blue-collar workers will instinctively feel that a sit-down with their manager is a sign of trouble, a punishment of sorts. Reframe expectations by assuring workers that the purpose of the 1:1 is to build a relationship, uncover obstacles or process improvements, and ensure that the worker is getting everything they need to succeed and grow in their role.

#### How to Measure Blue-Collar Manager Effectiveness

- Achievement of individual and team goals.
- Planned vs. unplanned overtime, call off rates, risk of burnout (e.g., working more than xx hours).



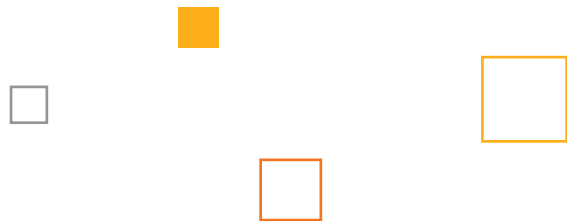
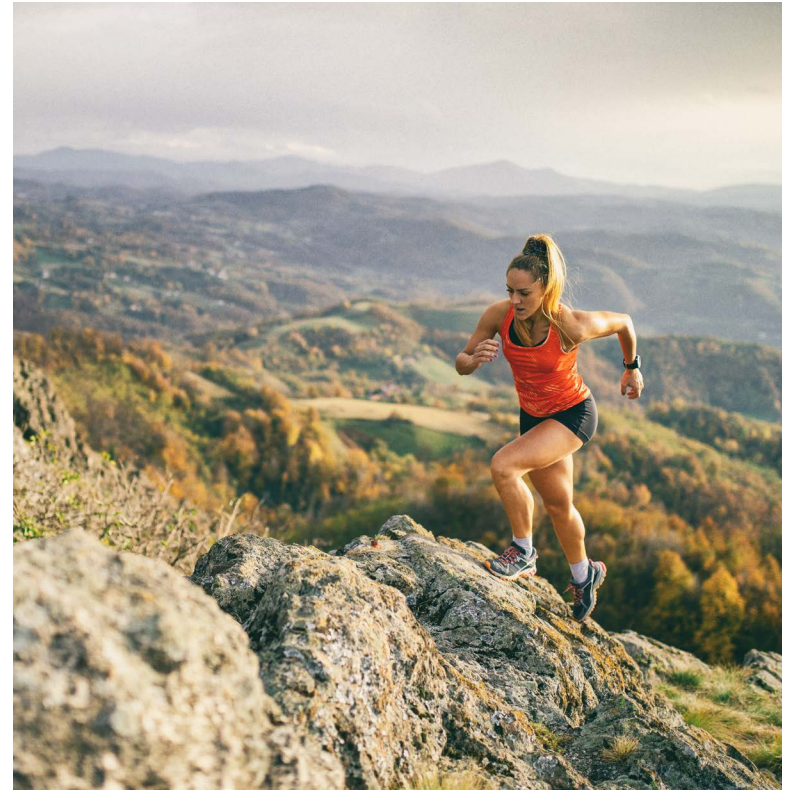
“ We use the OGSM [objectives, goals, strategies, metrics] model...starting at the enterprise level, we say, 'here are the 5 things we want to focus on.' Then these goals are cascaded down, all the way to the associate level, so everyone has personal objectives that line up to the company mission. And associates can track their individual progress on the Paycor system.”

—HR Leader Alex Ross, GEON



#### How Paycor Helps:

Progress Tracking, Performance Reviews, Reporting, Goals/OKRs, Time Budgeting/Forecasting, Performance Review Templates Customized for Industry



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## Coach > Optimize > Retain



**DEFINITION:** Leaders **inspire loyalty** by rewarding and incentivizing employees *in a holistic way* that makes them feel authentically valued.

### Why Retention Is Important

**Retaining employees is a long-term growth strategy.** It helps maintain company culture, preserves institutional knowledge, and gives team members the chance to form healthy relationships and even friendships, all of which are good for the business.

**Turnover is expensive.** It can cost between 30% and 150% of an employee's salary to replace them (*Harrison HR*). And there are intangible costs. Turnover can be contagious, especially if the people who leave are well-liked. The key to building a turnover-resistant organization is an understanding of what motivates individuals then rewarding and incentivizing them in a variety of ways, not just monetarily.



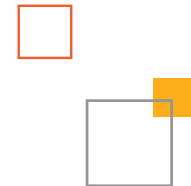


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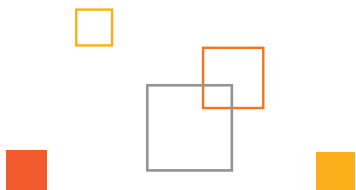
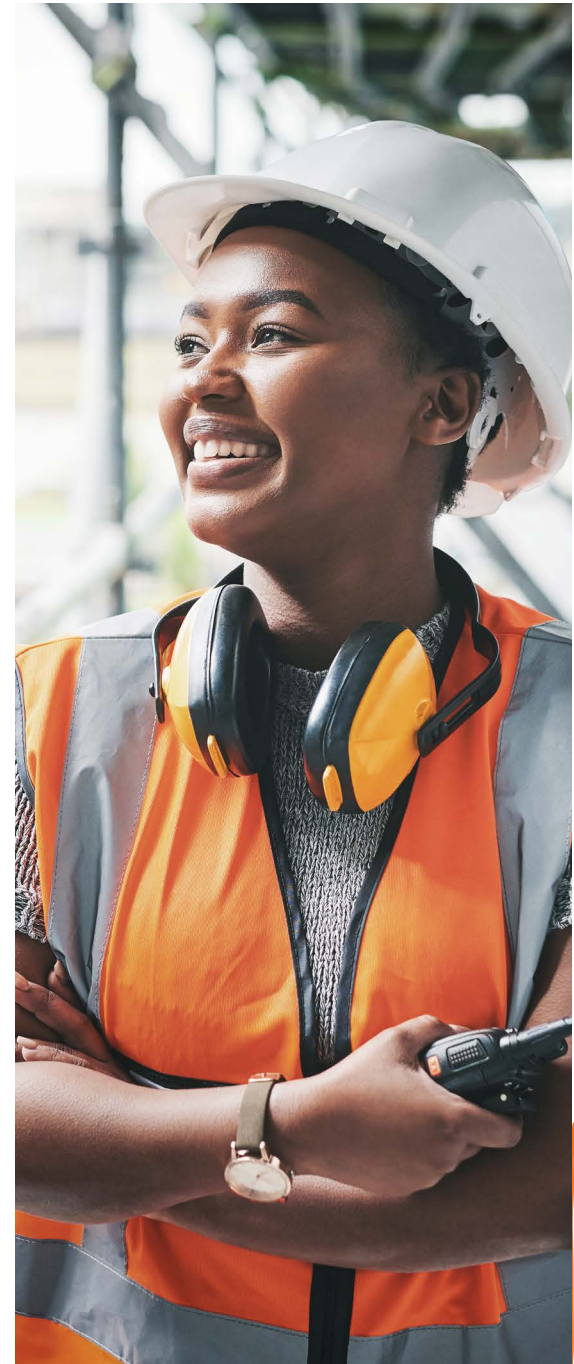


## How to Retain in the Blue-Collar Workplace

Retention strategies need to be customized to the needs and motivations of real people—that’s good advice for any workplace, but it’s especially relevant in the blue-collar workplace. Paycor partnered with Xavier University to survey frontline workers about what drives them. Here’s a brief overview of what we found. If your team consists of blue-collar, hourly, or frontline workers, you can use the following personas to begin thinking about retention strategies tailored to their needs.



- **“Payment Penny”** is motivated by reliable, consistent pay (number of hours she can work per week). An engagement driver for Penny is a clear pay progression plan and a culture that ties job performance to increased wages.
- **“Schedule Sarah”** is motivated by work/life balance and a schedule she can control or at least influence. An engagement driver for Sarah is a flexible schedule and the ability to work more hours and earn more pay when she needs to.
- **“Make-It-Happen Mike”** is an experienced worker who takes pride in his job. An engagement driver for Mike is autonomy and respect from white-collar staff.



- **“Ideas Isaac”** is an “idea person” and wants to be heard. An engagement driver for Isaac is a company culture that listens to and considers new ideas, whether they are implemented or not.
- **“Ladder-Climber Lisa”** is motivated by job title and increasing her sphere of influence. An engagement driver for Lisa is a clear path for career growth and frequent touchpoints to ensure she’s making progress.

### How to Measure Blue-Collar Manager Effectiveness

- Resignation metrics by manager (filter by tenure, role, and DE&I to identify trends).
- Track volume & quality of recognition given by manager to team members.
- Compensation alignment with team members’ job titles.



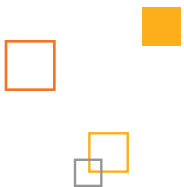
“ We attract and retain people in similar ways. It’s all in our talent development programs. **You have to show people a path that makes sense for them.** We have touchpoints along the way to say, ‘here’s how you fit into GEON now, here’s where your career can go in the future, wherever you happen to be at the moment.’”

–HR Leader Alex Ross, GEON



### How Paycor Helps:

Benefits, Comp Planning, Pulse, Paycor Wallet, Recognition, AI Analytics Digital Assistant, Scheduling, Team Insights Dashboard

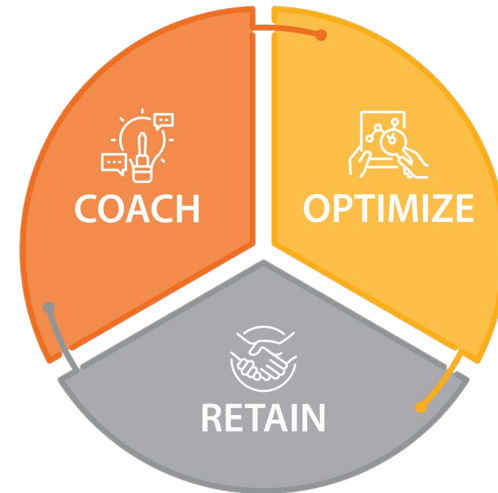









# Paycor Empowers Leaders of Blue-Collar & Frontline Teams.

Find and hire quality candidates with Paycor Smart Sourcing, an innovative new AI-driven recruiting tool. Then, use Paycor's COR Leadership Framework to inspire fierce loyalty and extreme engagement.



 **COACH**  
Paycor provides targeted training for frontline managers, designed to help them hone their leadership skills at every level of development.  
*Onboarding, 1:1 tool, Career Management, Leader Homepage, 9-Box, LMS, Paycor Paths*

 **OPTIMIZE**  
Give performance reviews on Paycor's mobile app for workers who don't sit at a desk. Plus, Paycor now offers customized performance review templates for industries that employ "deskless" workers.  
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Paycor enables leaders to build a culture of retention with a full suite of products designed to reward, recognize, and support employees.  
*Benefits, Comp Planning, Pulse, Paycor Wallet, Recognition, AI Analytics Digital Assistant, Scheduling, Team Insights Dashboard*



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## About Paycor

Paycor's human capital management (HCM) platform modernizes every aspect of people management, from recruiting, onboarding and payroll to career development and retention, but what really sets us apart is our focus on leaders. For more than 30 years we've been listening to and partnering with leaders, so we know what they need: a unified HR platform, easy integration with third party apps, powerful analytics, talent development software, and configurable technology that supports specific industry needs. That's why more than 30,000 customers trust Paycor to help them solve problems and achieve their goals.

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