

Manager's Remorse

When Retention Isn't Worth The Price



Katie Wilde

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**VP of Engineering
Ambassador Labs**





Meet Hillary

Retention Success

- **Staff Engineer**
- **Technically brilliant**
- **Great with mentoring**
- **Likes to solve hard problems**

Solving Hard Problems

... That We Didn't Actually Have

- Intrinsic motivation: creating new systems and designing elegant architecture
 - That we don't actually need, and nobody else can maintain
- Cever solutions are creating new problems
 - Distributed auth system
 - Build system needs a PhD in Docker
- Eventually, Hillary resigns to work for a bigger co. I am relieved.

Lesson: Business Needs First

- Match “fulfilling work” with what Business actually needs
- Say No to complex plans driven by boredom (or resume-driven development)
- Some people will outgrow you.
 - That is OK. Arguably, it’s a job well done.
 - Know when to let go.

Meet Boran

Retention Success

- Employee number 3
- Knows all our systems & people
- “How will we cope without him”
- Sales LOVES him
- Likes to feel Significant



Getting That Director Title

... That He Didn't Actually Earn

- Feeling Significant meant a bigger title
 - Ravi works as an IC, and jumps around doing whatever comes up
- Over time, the org grows and we have EMs, Staff engineers, etc
 - Lone wolf heroics are causing friction
 - Fairness issues
 - Level/title inflation
- Eventually, Ravi resigns to found a new startup. I am relieved.

Lesson: titles must be the real deal

- Make sure titles you give out are in line with industry standards
 - Keep flexibility - “Lead” “Head of” etc are easier to build around
- Not all your early hires will scale as the company grows up.
 - That’s Ok. You might not need Pioneers anymore because they did their jobs so well.

Meet Miki

Retention Success

- Core player, does a great job
- Hard to find skillset
- Invested loads in training them
- Tough to replace
- Wants to feel Progress



Matching Their Outside Offer

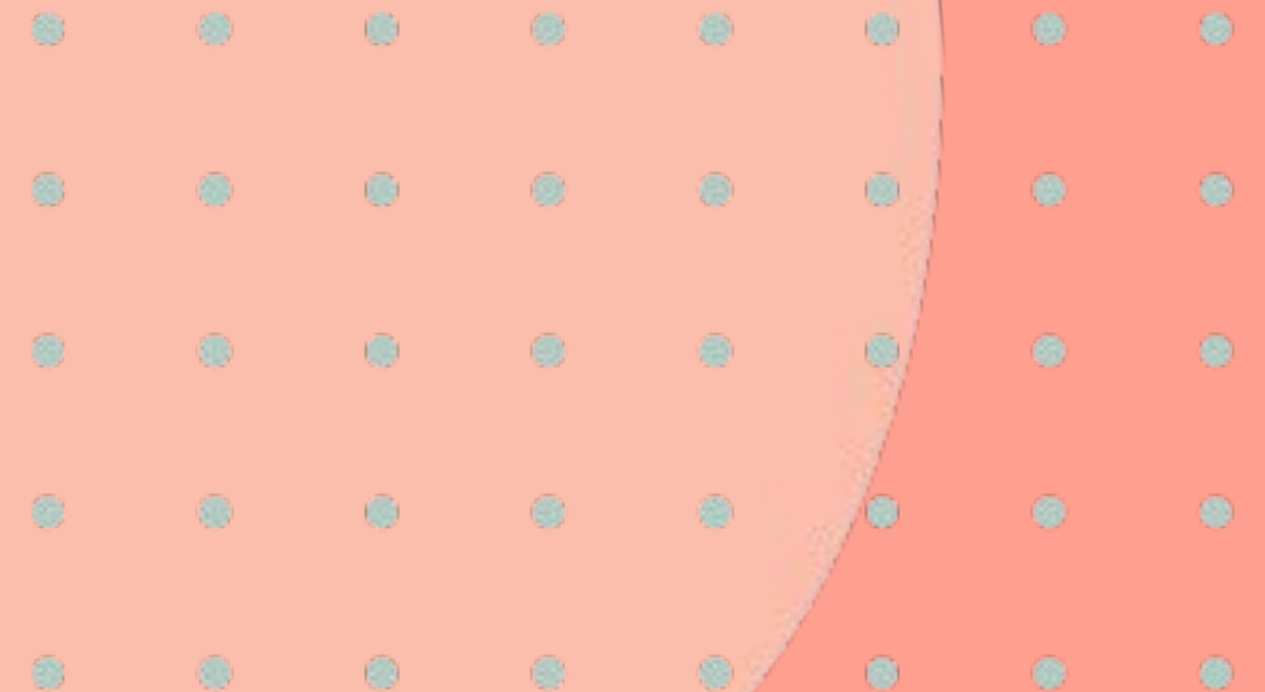
... That They Took Anyway After 6 Months

- Making progress meant getting a raise and moving up the levels
 - Miki got an offer elsewhere as a Senior SRE (with big pay bump).
Would love to stay! If only the pay was better...
- The promotion was ‘too little too late’
 - Miki was already shields down
 - Others resented what they saw as “negotiating a raise”
 - Salary bands are now messed up (Miki paid out of band)
- Eventually, Miki takes that job. I am relieved.

Lesson: Don't Negotiate With Terrorists

- Once someone has an outside offer, it's too late
- They're already Shields Down
- Just say no. I have never matched an outside offer.
- I have seen 3 cases THIS YEAR where I made an offer, old company matches it, and the person came to work for me anyway a few months later
- (I have a small org)
- Revisit comp, levels promotion process - but looking forward, for others.

These Are All Real Mistakes

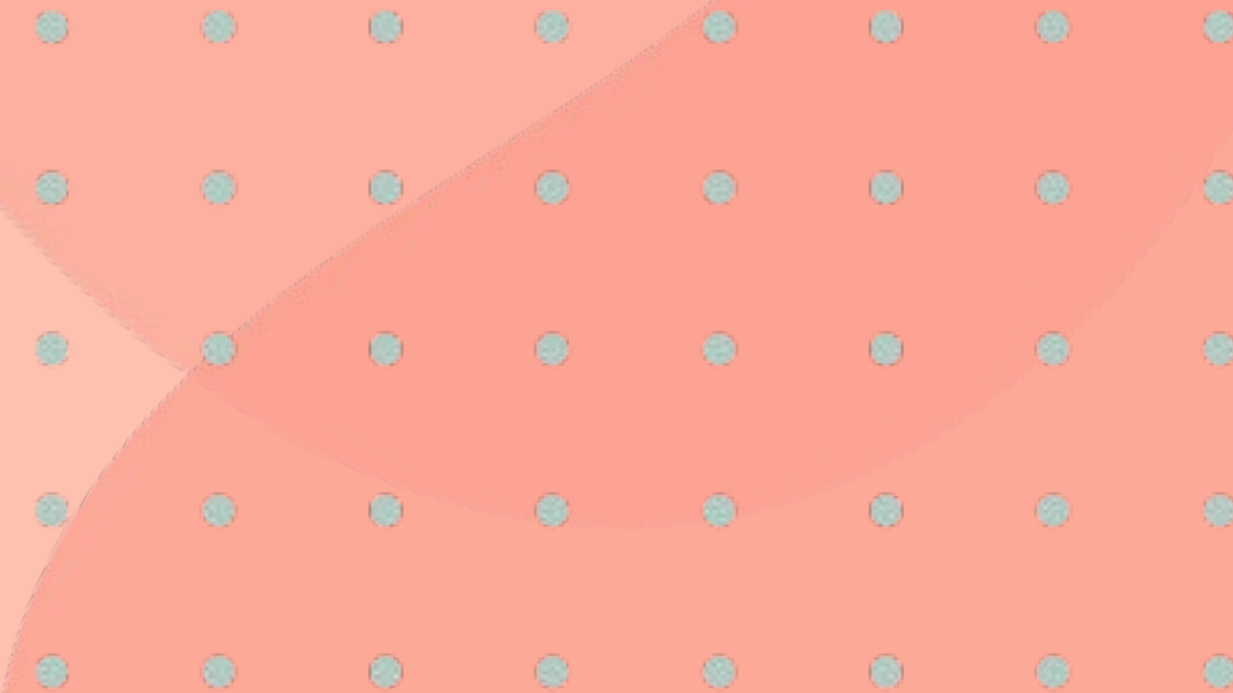


Because All These Things Are The Good Manager's Job:

- Intrinsic Motivation
- Fulfilling, Interesting Work
- Rewarding Titles
- Competitive Salaries
- Avoid Losing Critical Personnel

**Why Did
I Make
Them?**

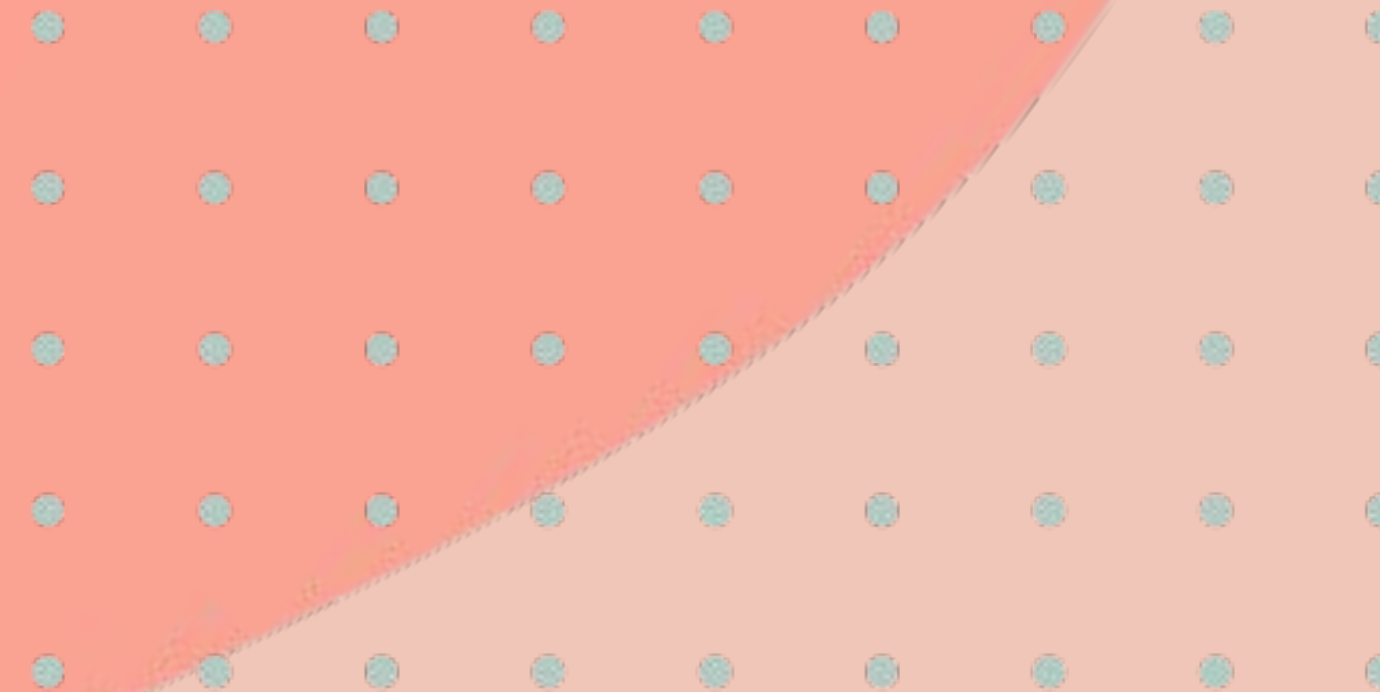
**Retaining High Impact, Hard To
Replace Teammates Is My Job.
But Not At Any Cost.**



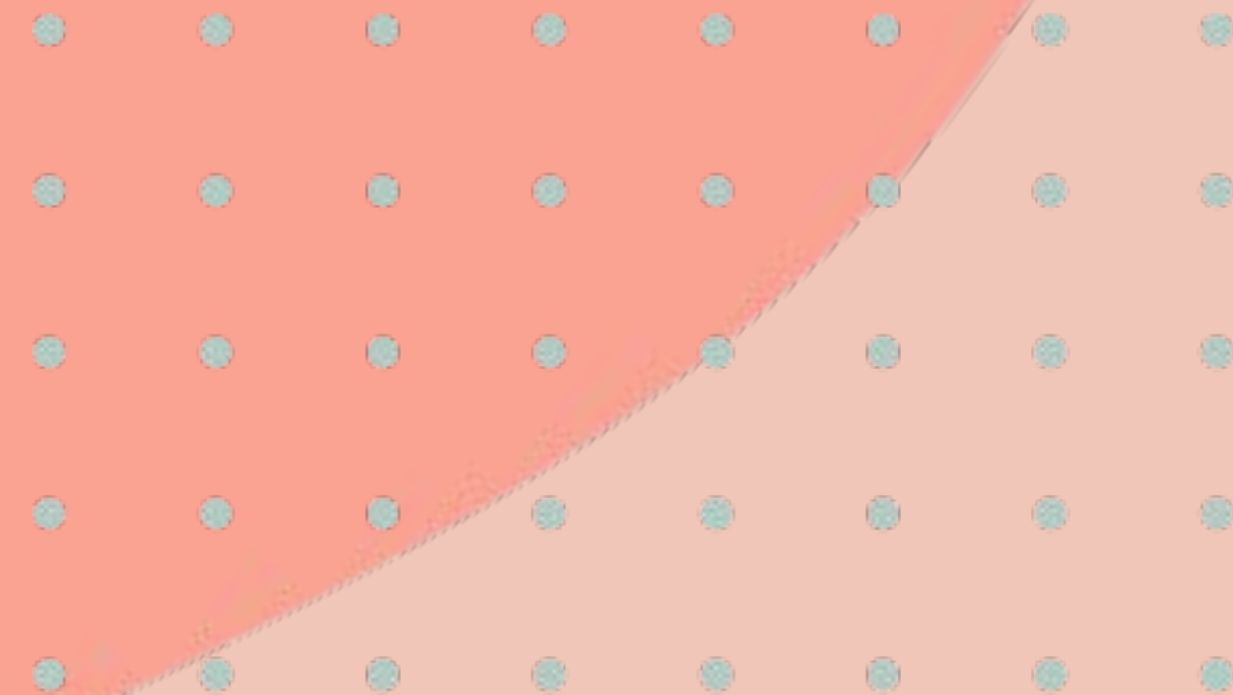
Heuristics For When Not To Retain

- If You Give Them What They Want, Will They Still Meet Their Job Description?
- Is The Job Description Still Something You Need?
- How Does This Choice Scale:
 - Over Time
 - As Your Org Grows
- Do You Feel You Have “No Choice”? (You Do, And It’s Likely ‘no’!

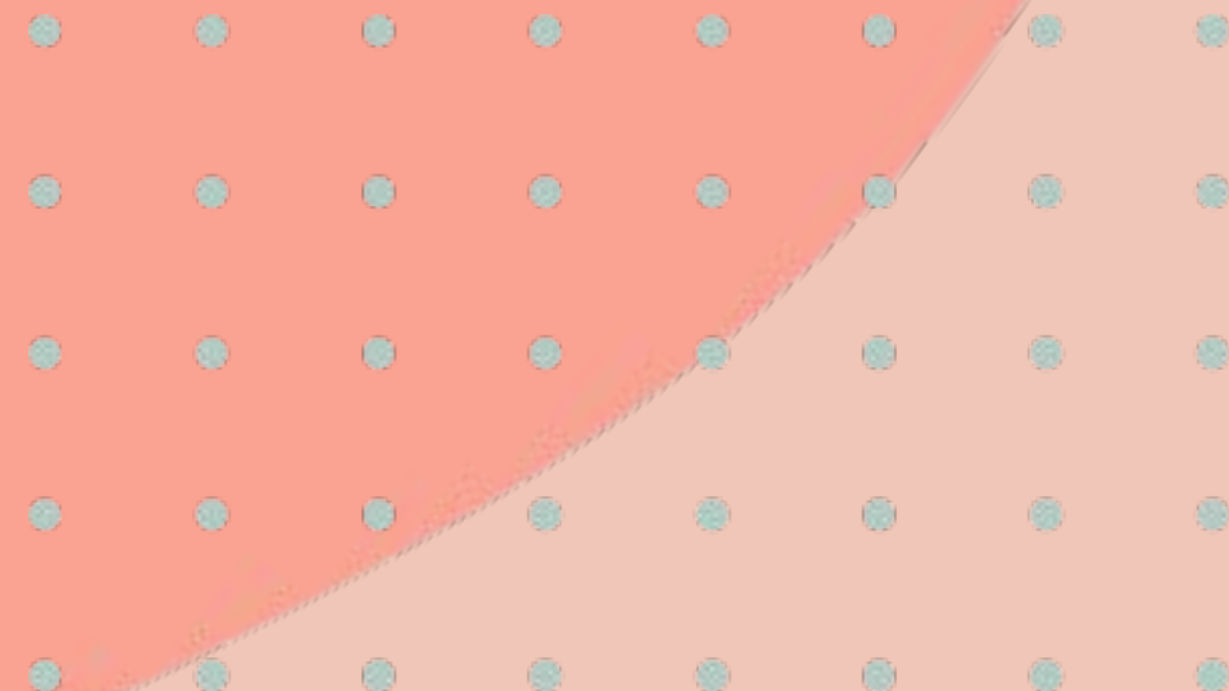
Fear is the Mind Killer



Don't Negotiate With Terrorists



Every job has a Sell-By date



**Good Managers Know How
To Retain People.
Great Managers Know
When Not To Try.**

Thank You
@gokatiewilde

