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Beyond the Paycheck: PDS CHRO on building total rewards for talent retention

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There has been a rapid shift in employee preferences. Hence, HR leaders are redefining what it means to attract, retain, and engage employees.

At the heart of this transformation lies a strategic rethink of Total Rewards –a concept that now goes far beyond compensation.

“True talent value extends beyond just a paycheck,” says Raamann Ahuja, Group CHRO at PDS Limited. “People want to feel recognised, supported, and connected to a larger purpose.”

Total rewards as a strategic lever for retention and engagement

For PDS Limited, a global apparel manufacturing company, a well-structured total rewards program plays a pivotal role in talent management. Their approach combines competitive compensation with meaningful recognition, growth opportunities, and purpose-driven engagement.

“In today’s workplace, employees thrive when they have opportunities to grow, be mentored, and see their contributions acknowledged,” Ahuja emphasises.

Recognition, a core cultural pillar at PDS, is brought to life through signature initiatives like the PDS Annual Awards and Business Awards—celebrating not just performance but values-driven leadership. “We also encourage open dialogue through town halls and leadership connects, which fosters inclusion and transparency,” adds Ahuja.

Learning, purpose, and connection: The modern employee experience

Recognising that career growth is central to employee satisfaction, PDS has institutionalised development through the PDS Learning Academy. This platform offers personalised leadership coaching and upskilling in soft, technical, and managerial domains—including Harvard Business School case study reviews.

Beyond growth, purpose alignment is woven into the employee experience. PDS publishes an annual Sustainability Report, reinforcing its commitment to ethical leadership and giving employees a deeper sense of impact.

“By creating these opportunities, we make sure every employee feels seen, valued, and empowered to succeed,” says Ahuja.

Aligning total rewards with business goals

Ahuja believes that total rewards are not just an HR tool—they are a business enabler. At PDS, the strategy is directly linked to business goals, driving high performance, innovation, and collaboration.

“We have implemented variable pay, real-time recognition, and development-linked rewards that reflect individual and team contributions to business outcomes,” he explains.

Their performance management system, integrated into a robust HRMS, enables continuous feedback, fair appraisals, and incentive alignment—all anchored to organisational objectives.

Measuring ROI and mitigating risks

The impact of a total rewards strategy at PDS is measurable. According to Ahuja, their Annual Employee Engagement Survey has shown a strong year-on-year improvement, with:

- +16% in training & development scores

- +15% in work-life balance ratings

“ROI must be viewed across both tangible and intangible lenses,” he says. Tangible benefits include reduced turnover and hiring costs, while intangible returns come from deeper engagement, stronger culture, and improved productivity.

“An organisation without a well-defined total rewards program, companies face significant risks, including diminished employee engagement, higher attrition rate, drop in wellbeing and higher absenteeism leading to loss of productivity,” warns Ahuja.

Such shortcomings can lead to higher operational costs and a weakened competitive position in the market, he emphasises.

Future-Ready: Total Rewards Trends for 2025

To maintain a competitive edge, Ahuja suggests that companies should implement performance-based compensation structures and a diverse range of benefits that evolve with employees’ needs while driving alignment with organisational objectives. “Prioritising employee-driven growth strategies that focus on recognition, skill development, and engagement can significantly boost job satisfaction and long-term retention,” he says.

As organisations enter a new era of workforce expectations, PDS Limited’s approach shows that investing in purpose, recognition, and growth is not just good for people—it’s great for business.

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