

Why good people leave

There are few things more draining for an organisation than the steady, systematic loss of highly effective and productive people.

Of course, there's nothing new about people trying to improve their lot. Many outstanding people use periodic job changes as a key part of their career management strategy.

However, when evidence of dissatisfaction among top employees seems to be a recurring theme, something has to be done.

Why are staff leaving?

People leave jobs for a reason. Examples are:

- loss of faith in management
- feeling unappreciated, bored or unchallenged
- frustration with excessive politics
- more money
- feeling used or exploited
- concern about the future of the firm
- the departure of a close friend
- a more flexible benefits package.

Some leave because they can't live with what they consider unsatisfactory company practices, such as unreasonable working hours, an unpleasant working environment or a lack of state-of-the-art equipment.

Addressing work-life issues

Today, some employees leave for reasons best referred to as work-life issues. If this is the case with your company, you may want to consider implementing some programmes.

For example, through the use of technology, employees can be spared much unnecessary travel. Others may benefit from being allowed to telecommute, so long as you provide adequate guidance, keep employees in the loop, and otherwise monitor performance. Other options include job-sharing.

Yet another option is to allow an "A" player who wants to spread his or her wings to continue as a freelancer or contractor.

How to keep your people loyal

There are nine keys to employee loyalty:

1. Management's behaviour and reputation is a key factor in whether employees stay or go.
2. A clear, well-conceived mission and vision keeps employees focused and connected.
3. Recognising and rewarding exceptional performance encourages the same.
4. A good company reputation will attract and bond many people.
5. A focus on building pride encourages longevity.
6. A sense of long-term viability provides stability and encourages loyalty.
7. Opportunity for growth and training encourages commitment.
8. Opportunity for promotion helps keep career-minded employees around.
9. A commitment to driving out fear and minimising politics will ensure that employees don't leave out of a sense of self-preservation.

Leadership is key to employee retention

Sticking to the old way of leading — controlling things through power — may be encouraging employees to leave. Today, good leaders lead by persuasion and motivation.

Because an employee's immediate supervisor is key to their job satisfaction, leaders must learn how to lead today's workforce. Great leaders have enthusiastic followers and focus on getting things done. Their guiding light is an unwavering set of convictions, and they act on those convictions. They demonstrate trust, conviction and loyalty, so they inspire it, too.

Find out why an employee leaves

The stated reason typically isn't the real reason. What sparked the job search in the first place? Was it dissatisfaction with a supervisor? Lack of advancement opportunity? Disenchantment with working conditions?

Ask departing staff questions such as what they liked most and least about their jobs, how satisfied they were with the compensation system, and whether they made the kind of progress they would have liked. Consider a follow-up enquiry six months down the line.

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