

Employers We Love, Employers We Leave

By Fiorella Callocchia - featured in Canadian HR Reporter

Many employers still haven't figured out why some employees stay while others are walking out the door?

Turnover represents a significant drain on the corporate bottom line, and managers should — and can — be trained to spot the early warning signs of dissatisfaction and be proactive in the retention of valued staff.



There are a number of early warning signs that an employee might be shopping around for a new opportunity. Here are a few clues employers have discovered in the past — some seemingly unimportant while others dead giveaways — which suggest employees may be on the lookout for other work:

- A sudden upgrade in personal appearance;
- Little or no interest in performance reviews;
- An increased in the number of personal phone calls (outgoing and incoming);
- Anytime a copy of a resume is found in the copier or fax machine;
- Changes in behaviour at staff meetings — employees that are thinking about moving on become either very vocal or have incredibly quiet;
- Inquiries about how the internal job posting system works;
- Requests to review the contents of employee files;
- Coming in late, leaving early or taking long lunches on a regular basis;
- Entire vacation entitlement are being taken in one day increments;
- Working fewer hours or mysteriously working a lot of overtime hours;
- Running into them at a career fair; and
- For employees concerned they may be without benefits for a while, there is an unusual interest in stocking up from the company drug or prescription plan. Trips to the dentist for the first time in a long while may mean something is up.

Common reasons employees leave their position

So, why are employees leaving you? Exit interviews can be an important tool in learning more about your organization and what may be driving employees to other companies. Here are some of the reasons employees cite in exit interviews and by job candidates during recruitment interviews about why they left their previous job:

- The management team did not know what they were doing, they did not have a plan or strategy and if they did, we were not aware of it;
- Promotions were based on "who" you knew not "what" you knew;
- I did not feel appreciated;

- My manager did not support me;
- They did not provide opportunities for growth and development;
- I was never praised for a good job but quickly criticized for making a mistake;
- Nobody cared about my opinion;
- I did not have the proper tools to perform my job well;
- There was too much favouritism or politics;
- My work was not valued;
- Nobody did anything about the employees who did not pull their weight; and
- Everyone just looked out for themselves and there was no team spirit.

So what can managers do to be proactive? First, decide who the key people in the organization are, and then create a focused, customized strategy retention for each one. Obviously there are countless ways to accomplish this and every situation will differ with the unique circumstances of each employee. But the following suggestions represent a number of proven practices to help businesses reduce their turnover and hold onto key staff:

- Make a point of giving generous amounts of verbal recognition. Based on what you know about the employee, it can either be done privately or in front of coworkers. Don't be shy about giving compliments. We all like to hear them.
- Do performance reviews in a timely, respectful manner and give increases and bonuses that are aligned to the employee's contribution.
- Customize rewards and recognition to the employee's needs and motivators. Consider employee values? If you are not sure what they are, ask and find out. Some employees value money while others look for non-monetary rewards that help them with other aspects of their life such as the ability to work from home on occasion, flex hours, customized benefits, casual dress, movie or restaurant passes.
- Review compensation practices. Are they current? Do they reflect where the company wants to be in the market? Do employees understand how pay and bonus decisions are made? Are employees fairly paid for their level of performance, contribution, skills and value added? A recent survey indicated that less than 35 per cent of employees even understand how pay decisions are made in their company.
- Does the benefit program reflect the changing needs of employees and fit the demographic profile? Are the benefits marketed as part of the total compensation package?
- Get to know employees and understand their career goals and objectives. Conduct career management workshops. Market and sell tuition reimbursement program. Ensure this area is covered as part of the review process. Teach managers how to conduct positive performance reviews that motivate and inspire employees.

- Encourage managers to do a lot more listening and a lot less talking. Meet with employees one on one. Stay in touch. Knowing why employees stay will help ensure you keep doing the “right” things. If possible, conduct annual employee satisfaction surveys to determine what is working and what is not. Teach managers to pay attention to any changes in behaviour or productivity whether they are negative or positive.
- Help employees achieve their career dreams. Ensure managers receive career coaching skills and conduct these types of discussions with staff. Spot opportunities for values employees within the organization if you can’t keep them challenged in their current role. Remind managers it is far better for the organization to promote or transfer an employee than lose them to the competition. Make sure employees understand what it takes to get promoted.
- The quality of the relationship an employee has with the organization is usually determined by the quality of the relationship they have with their immediate manager. Are managers and supervisors well trained in all aspects of relationship management? Are employees being treated as well as valued customers or suppliers?
- Ask employees how you can be a better manager or leader. Once you get some suggestions, address their concerns. Consider doing a leadership skills assessment to identify strengths and areas in need of development. Sometimes just knowing the manager is trying to improve their leadership style will give employees hope and the desire to stay put.
- Ensure all human resource practices and processes are up-to-date, documented, accessible to everyone and being utilized. Continuously market to employees the features and benefits of working for your company. This will make them less susceptible when approached by a competitor or search firm.
- Create a welcoming, team-oriented work environment. The stronger the ties are between team members, the less likely they are to leave. Encourage employees to attend company functions and organize activities that foster relationships. Employees are reluctant to give up strong social networks.
- Share any information you can about how the business is doing: new customers, financial performance, strategies, plans, department goals. It not only conveys trust in employees but that you recognize their role and part in the business.

You may not be able to retain every employee but these strategies will go a long way to communicating the message that you value and care about the work relationship. In the end, if they do leave, stay in touch. You just never know when they might want to come back.