

## Six factors that push good employees out the door

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Guest Columnist

In exit interviews, departing employees often say they left for a "better opportunity." You may assume this means "more money." Often that is exactly what it means. But, on closer inspection, there may have been deeper motivations involved.

Many top performers get calls from recruiters enticing them to pursue more-lucrative positions with other companies. Yet they often decline to pursue these opportunities. Why? Because they are satisfied enough where they are.

Top performers who do pursue these invitations are usually dissatisfied in one or more key areas — growth prospects, lack of challenge or a poor relationship with the boss. We refer to these as "push factors" because they push the employee to start thinking about leaving the company. The recruiter's call, on the other hand, is a "pull factor" that stimulates the employee to take action.

The six most common "push factors" — reasons good employees leave — are:

1. The employee sees no relationship between performance and paycheck.

It is dispiriting to those employees who work harder and smarter and get better results than their

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peers, yet receive the same percentage pay increase or bonus. When the opposite situation exists — when employees know they will be rewarded monetarily in proportion to greater results, they become motivated, energized and less likely to leave.

2. They don't perceive growth or advancement opportunities.

The key word here is "perception." If an employee perceives no growth or advancement opportunities, even when they do exist, then for all practical purposes, they do not exist. In a common scenario, an employee announces her resignation to a manager, who responds, "I'm surprised and disappointed. I had planned to promote you." This can happen when neither the employee nor manager has taken the time to schedule a meeting where career options and opportunities can be discussed.

3. They don't see their work as important, or their contributions are not recognized and valued.

Remember the old story about two stonemasons who are asked what they are doing? One replies, "I'm carving stone." The other says, "I'm building a cathedral." The cathedral builder, of course is more likely to stay on the job

The point is, every employee must be made to feel that he or she is "building a cathedral." All workers need to believe their work is centrally important to the success of the enterprise. This means that the employee's manager needs to convey, with feeling, how these workers can become heroes in the achievement of the company's mission. Managers must also learn not to be stingy with praise, for consistent praise fuels the feeling of being valued.

4. They don't get to use their natural talents.

Many people take jobs out of economic necessity without giving much thought about whether the job will make use of their natural abilities. Likewise, many companies hire workers out of economic necessity because they need a "warm body" in that slot right now. Getting the right person in the job is often an afterthought. After a while on the job, however, both employees and employers grow weary of the mismatch between talents and tasks. Eventually, one or the other initiates a reassignment or a termination, creating another costly turnover.

5. They have unclear or unrealistic expectations.

New hires often expect immediate challenge and rapid advancement. When neither happens, they either "quit on the job" or quit the

company. Manual workers sometimes quit because they realize after a few days on the job how dirty or greasy or hot the work is. Office workers quit because they are assigned to a cubicle instead of the office they expected.

6. They will no longer tolerate abusive managers or toxic environments.

The job market is too good for most workers to feel they have to stay in an environment where they must tolerate abusive treatment or unreasonable stress. In her book *Corporate Abuse*, Marti Smye presents systemic abuse, as when a company is not "walking the talk" and reneges on commitments; structural abuse, generally caused by outside market pressures; and deliberate abuse, where managers negate employees instead of encouraging them.

Waves of downsizings and the proliferation of toxic and abusive companies have all but killed company loyalty.

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