

# The Pendulum Is Swinging

## Why Your Employees Are Headed for the Door and What You Can Do About It

What a difference a year makes! Twelve months ago companies were throwing human ballast off their sinking ships. While executives have not returned to the frenetic hiring of previous times, they want to keep who they have. Business publications are returning to 'the war for talent' headlines. The focus has shifted from saving jobs to saving people from leaving.

### Why You Should Pay Attention to the Career Needs of Your Employees

**1. They are envisioning their future, and you are not in the picture.** BlessingWhite's [engagement research](#) shows that employees consistently identify **career development opportunities** as the number one way to increase their job satisfaction. Yet our [career research](#) reveals that only one in two believe they have decent career opportunities with their current employer. Over a third expect their next career move will take them elsewhere. What's most important to your employees *is* their career — and many believe they need to go to some other company to achieve their goals!

Ed Stapor, Partner and Co-CEO North America, Euro RSCG Life says, "The cost of recruitment and loss of productivity is still much higher than the cost of retention. Yet most companies are surprised by turnover and wonder 'why' rather than doing something about it."

**2. More than a quarter are ripe for the picking.** Those high performers whom you held hostage last year are now being courted by your competitors. The 29% of employees who are engaged in the typical organization, while not immune, are less likely to respond to competitive overtures. However, the 27% who are 'almost engaged' are strong performers — and they'll take the call from a search firm. The 'almost engaged' also do well in interviews because they are reasonably satisfied and are doing good work. (People who complain about their bosses and companies convey radioactivity to prospective employers. I am always amazed when applicants whine — but it does make the decision not to hire them easier.)



**3. There are fewer traditional opportunities or obvious career paths.** Leaner organizations, flattened structures, and just-in-time workforce deployment can send the message that there's no place for employees to go. As a result, managers avoid career conversations out of fear that they can't describe the next promotion. Employees, who say they want 'career development' but don't actually know what they mean by that, will act on notions of yesterday's career landscape as opposed to today's career-as-a-series-of-fulfilling-assignments world of work. It may be easier for them to pursue a concrete opportunity outside your organization than sort through the options inside.

## So What Are You Supposed to Do?

**1. Redefine career development:** it's not about promotions every 18 months.

- Publish your organization's point of view on career development. Emphasize new experiences, skill development and interesting work, not job descriptions and clear-cut paths.
- Publicize lateral moves, not just promotions, and highlight the different paths that your top performers have taken. Employees need to believe that career paths are no longer linear and that the greatest opportunity for increasing satisfaction might be finding new opportunities in their current positions.

**2. Help your employees clarify what they want — and what they can offer.** Employees need to be able to answer questions such as:

- What are my true talents? What differentiates me?
- What weaknesses are fatal flaws that must be addressed?
- What does a 'great day at work' look like? How can I make sure I have more of them?
- What are the conditions under which I do my best work?
- What criteria are most important in my next job or assignment?
- What are my long-term career aspirations?

**3. Equip managers to act as career coaches** — to help employees get where they want to go and where the organization needs them to be.

- Managers don't need to have all the answers. They don't need a list of job openings.
- Managers do need to ask the right questions to help employees clarify their goals. They do need to provide appropriate feedback for development and consider where their employees' talents can make the biggest difference for the organization.

Ed Stapor points out, "If one of your stars leaves and you are surprised, shame on you! You are not doing your job of connecting and nurturing your staff. There is a linear correlation between your staff's job satisfaction and their contribution to the company's success."

**4. Don't think you've solved this problem because you put information online:** employees rate their companies' online career sites low in value.

- Online is an easy solution — which doesn't work very well in a vacuum. Online tools are only effective when combined with career coaching and networking conversations with colleagues. High tech cannot replace high-touch brainstorming and advice.
- If you build it, they won't come — unless you engage them. You need a plan for motivating employees to use the tools provided.
- Encourage employees to do their career planning during normal business hours — this is for the company's benefit as much as for the employee's. You don't want them pursuing their career agendas down the street.

Does this sound like a lot of work? Perhaps. You can either focus on careers now or spend a lot of time recruiting, on-boarding and training all the new employees you will need in the coming months!

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**For more information on how BlessingWhite can help your organization become more strategic with career development call +613 9889 5687 or email [regp@blessingwhiteap.com](mailto:regp@blessingwhiteap.com)**