

Is Your Talent Waiting for Opportunity to Knock?

Ask people why they work, and the quick answer may be money. But the reality of why people join and stay with an organization or a particular job is more complex. It's a delicate dance between what they want from a job and what their organization can provide.

We explored employees' intentions to stay on the job in our *2008 State of Employee Engagement* research, which will be published in April and reflects the experiences of 7,508 survey respondents worldwide. Here are highlights of what we found.

Staying for more than a 'job'

Our research indicates that most employees will stick around if they have fulfilling work or perceive significant career or growth opportunities. 29% of survey respondents who say they plan to stay with their employer through 2008 indicate they will do so because of their *work* — "I like the work that I do." Another 23% plan to remain because their job supports their personal *career goals* — "I have significant development or advancement opportunities."

Satisfying work was the top-ranked response for respondents living in North America, UK/Ireland, Continental Europe, Australia/New Zealand, and Southeast Asia, whereas career opportunity was the leading reason in India and China.

The responses rounding out the top 5 reasons to stay are:

- "My organization's mission — I believe in what we do" (12%)
- "My job conditions — I have flexible hours, a good commute, etc." (10%)
- "My finances — I expect a desirable salary, bonus, or stock options in 2008" (8%)

So what about employees who aren't set on staying?

Dreaming of greener pastures

Lack of career opportunity is the main reason employees are thinking about a move. 27% of our survey respondents cite "My career — I don't have opportunities to grow or advance here" as the factor most influencing their restive state. "My finances — I want to earn more money" ranked second for the overall survey population (18%). (One notable exception here is India, where finances beat out career — but only just — as the top motivation for thoughts of leaving.)

The responses rounding out the top 5 reasons employees are considering a move are:

- "My desire for change — I want to try something new" (14%)
- "My work — I don't like what I do or it doesn't make the most of my talents" (13%)
- "My job conditions — I don't have the flexibility, commute, etc. that I need" (9%)

Only 7% of respondents selected "My manager — I don't like working for him or her," suggesting that although *bad* bosses may trigger employee flight, the influence of an individual's manager may be overstated in the ubiquitous maxim "employees join companies but leave managers."

In fact, our research suggests that the majority of employees who are at risk are not actually *leaving* anything. They tend to be *opportunistic*. They're not totally dissatisfied, but they are open to possibilities of professional growth, a bigger paycheck, or a new adventure. They're pursuing something new and better — something they think they can't get with their current employer.

Tales of toxicity

The write-in comments of our survey, however, remind us of the pain experienced in those organizations that do have truly terrible working conditions from which employees flee:

- "We desperately need more resources. I enjoy my job 'in theory'...but I am burned out...My teammates and I have been looking for the light at the end of the tunnel for 18 months now, and it is not there."
- "The President and CEO should work out their own problems. They are getting in the way of my work and how this organization functions. Plus the office is just a depressing."
- "Change my manager — an unethical, egotistical person. That doesn't matter as much as the fact that he is a micromanager to boot!"

What does this mean to employers?

Chances are your firm is not a horrible place to work filled with badly behaved leaders. If it is, you probably know what you need to do to fix those problems.

And if you're hearing a chorus of the disgruntled, like the comments above, take heed, since some of the most impassioned laments often come from the highest contributors who are burning the midnight oil to deliver results — but failing to find personal satisfaction at work.

For most organizations, retention is a more amorphous and complex challenge: How can you ensure that employees find what they're looking for on your payroll while they're delivering on your strategic priorities?

That's where employee engagement comes in.

Our findings suggest that fully engaged employees are far less likely to be dreaming of a 'better place' outside your organization. Moreover, you know that retention alone isn't the ultimate prize. Your organization isn't going to leave competitors in the dust with a workforce of loyal employees who merely show up each day.

Copyright © 2008 BlessingWhite, Inc

For more information on how BlessingWhite can help your new recruits connect with the organization, call +61 3 9889 5687 or email info@blessingwhiteap.com.