Why Do Some of the Best Employees Leave?

Here's a startling statistic: 32 out of 100 employees *seriously want to switch jobs*! Another 21 out of 100 employees aren't looking to quit, but view their employers unfavorably. These are findings in a recent survey of 2,400 employees in the U.S. What might cause the best people in your workplace to jump ship?

Mercer's survey entitled *What's Working*, conducted over two quarters, found that 55 of 100 employees in the U.S. are unhappy in their jobs. Given the chance in today's poor employment economy they would want to quit their present employer and jump to another job.

Mercer, the global consulting and investment services firm, surveyed 30,000 employers in 17 countries (including 2,400 employees in the United States). On the issue of employees' satisfaction in their present employment, the key findings were:

- 32 of 100 employees in the U.S. are seriously considering leaving their current jobs at the present time. That compares to only 23 of 100 feeling the same way in 2005.
- 21 of 100 U.S. employees, though not looking to leave their jobs right now, view their employers unfavorably.

With such a high percentage of employees thinking about, and wanting to switch jobs, it's a good time for employers to consider "How do I hold on to our best employees and keep them from jumping ship?"

Answering that question, Mel Kleiman recommends employers take a serious look at *why* the best employees leave. Kleiman, president of Humetrics.com and author of *Hire Tough, Fire Easy*, offers the following top 10 reasons your best hourly employees leave:

10. Scheduling Conflicts. The employee took the job "because the employer promised *flexible hours*. But it turned out that *flexible hours* meant having to work whenever and however long the manager wants the employee to work." Says Kleiman, "The employer's definition of *flexible* is 'you are flexible for *our* hours.'" He reminds employers, "People have other lives outside work. One of the terms I use is, 'It isn't always about people wanting work-life balance, it's people wanting a family-friendly work environment.'"

9. Lack of Recognition. "I'd almost make this number 1. The supervisor never gives the employees any positive feedback for fear they might ask for a raise. But, Napoleon said it best, 'I can get people to die for a ribbon but can't get them to die for money.' Gallup polls report better than

over 65 percent of all American workers say they've received no recognition at work at all within the last year. There are three kinds of recognition in the world. Positive, negative and none at all. What do we give our best employees? No recognition at all, or we give them all the junk jobs."

8. Given All the "Dirty Work." When it comes to job assignments, the manager gives the worst jobs to the best people "because they can be depended on to do it right and not complain. I repeat what I just said about lack of recognition. There's positive, negative and none at all. What do we give our best employees? No recognition at all, or we give them all the junk jobs."

7. Lack of Respect. On this one, "the manager has the wires crossed, praising in private and criticizing in public. What I'm talking about is, we don't even recognize the value of all these people. When you empower people to do things, you respect them. Why not respect them and let them do the job? You get the employees you deserve. You have exactly the employees you hired working for you."

6. No Chance for Advancement. When the advancement opportunity arises, "the supervisor calls her circle of friends and hires from the outside rather than promoting from within," Kleiman explains.

"I think this says it all. Maybe even change that a bit. Are you helping people get what they want so they help you get what you want? And that is, if someone wants advancement, are you helping them get advancement? If you help people get what they want, they help you get what you want."

5. No Training. The manager "doesn't believe training is a good investment because the employee 'will leave in three months anyway.' My new philosophy is quit training employees," Kleiman says. "People join companies, they leave managers. If you have great managers your employees won't leave. It's better to train your managers. If you told a great manager you had no money to train employees, he'd find money to train his employees."

4. No Attention or Authority. "The supervisor never has any time to listen to his employees because he's so busy fighting fires and doing *important things*. Yet he doesn't give his employees the authority to solve problems themselves, either."

Adds Kleiman, "This is back to accountable. We never make the employees responsible. We give them responsibility, but we don't give them the authority to do something about it. An example: You give the employee the responsibility to make the customer happy. But you don't give them the authority to do anything."

3. Mind-numbing tasks. "The employee's work is boring and repetitive. The supervisor fails to find ways to make it more fun or more challenging for employees.

"The supervisor gives employees mind-numbing tasks without telling the people these tasks are important. There is no future in any job, there's only a future in the way you do the job. Maybe

the job has mind-numbing tasks. But the most important mind-numbing tasks are the most important tasks and have to get done. Who's the most important person in the restaurant? The dishwasher. If you don't have any clean dishes you can't serve food."

Adds Kleiman, "There are five things people want out of their jobs: One, a great boss and good coworkers. Two, interesting work. Three, growth and opportunity. Four, work-life balance, a family-friendly environment. And five, recognition."

2. Failed to Hire Tough. "Here's what I mean. The employee was not a good fit for the position because the manager put out the 'Help Wanted' sign and chose the person she thought interviewed best," Kleiman explains. "The number one reason employees leave is they leave managers. 'A' players don't have to play on 'B' teams. Make sure you only bring the best people into your organization, and don't hire a body."

1. Substandard Coworkers. The good employee "isn't paid enough to put up with the hiring mistakes." The hiring mistakes are "the people who turn out to be lazy, indifferent, or undependable coworkers." Kleiman repeats: 'A' players don't have to play on 'B' teams. Make sure you only bring the best people into your organization, and don't hire a body."

What about all those employees wanting to jump ship? In reaction to the findings in the Mercer survey, to recap, 32 of 100 employees in the U.S. are seriously considering leaving their current jobs, and 21 of 100 U.S. employees, though not looking to leave their jobs right now, view their employers unfavorably. Kleiman offers this advice to employers:

"There may be 25 or 55 percent of people wanting to take a new job," he says, "but the fact of the matter is, they're not looking for new jobs. What the [Mercer] survey is saying is, X percent of workers are dissatisfied with their jobs. It's harder today to hire great employees than it has been since 2007. Why? Nobody lets their best people go, in most cases. Nobody intentionally lets their best people go. The fact of the matter is, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. They [the employees] may not like the job they've got, but they know where they are. So the reality today is, it's harder to attract great people than in 2007."

Seven Questions To Ask Before Hiring

"The biggest problem we have in hiring the best people is, why are we hiring them the way we are hiring them? Why are we interviewing them the way we do?" Mel Kleiman says. He urges employers to ask the following seven questions before hiring anybody.

1. Do I need to hire? Why are we doing this job this way? Can we do this job differently?
2. Am I really committed to hiring "A" players?
3. If I'm really committed to hiring "A" players, do I have a written list of the 10 reasons "A" players should come to work for us?
4. Would I work for this job's manager?
5. Where am I going to find the "A" players?

6. How will I identify that they will be an "A" player within *our* organization?
7. Once I've got the "A" player hired, what are we going to do to retain them?