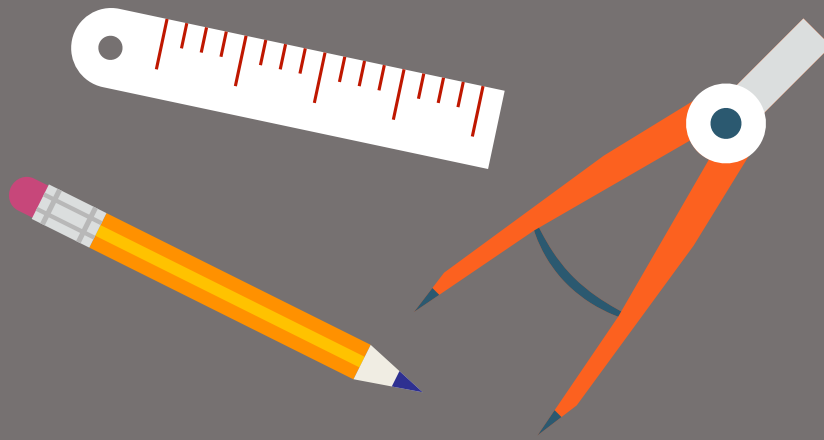


10 Warning Signs

You're About
to Lose a

Good Employee



PRACTICAL TOOLS

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Few things are more frustrating for a manager than spending time and effort investing in people, and then getting blindsided when a good employee suddenly quits.

It does happen and it points to a basic inequality in today's workplace. It's not a two-way street.

On the one hand, employees want more and more communication from management – to be informed about management's plans.

On the other hand, employees don't necessarily provide the most open feedback themselves.

For example, in an exit interview they may well say they have been unhappy for a period of time. But they also acknowledge that they did not share this with anyone who might have been able to help, whether a mentor, their supervisor or their manager.

While you can bemoan that disconnect, there's not much you can do about it.

The only thing you can do is outthink the employee who's trying to hide something and pick up the hidden signals that he or she is thinking of leaving – while there may be still time to intervene and keep the employee.

Tim Gardner, a Utah State University School of Business associate professor, has completed a study on voluntary turnover and his findings may surprise those who think they can easily identify an employee who is about to move on to a new job.

Gardner said he was surprised himself. For example, his research showed that an employee who showed the obvious signs (taking more vacation time, punching out at 5 p.m. daily and searching the Internet for job openings on company time), wasn't necessarily someone who was about to leave.

Good people are smarter than that – they don't make it that obvious.

Gardner discovered, however, that one thing most employees had in common before they left was that they began to “disengage” in the workplace.

The 10 tell-tale signs to watch for

Here is Gardner's list of 10 examples of subtle but consistent behavioral changes people often made in the last months before they leave their job:

- They became more reserved and quiet, which is atypical behavior for them.
- They seemed to “tune out” in meetings and stopped offering constructive contributions.
- They showed an increased reluctance to commit to long-term projects.

- They became less interested in opportunities to advance in the organization.
- They became less interested in pleasing their boss than before and didn't seem to care it might get them a below-average rating in their next performance review.
- They avoided social interactions with their immediate boss and other members of management – as if they didn't want to become “buddies” outside of work and then have to drop the bomb on them.
- They stopped making suggestions for new ideas, something they had done regularly up to that time.
- They began doing the minimum amount of work needed and no longer went beyond the call of duty, in another uncharacteristic departure from normal behavior.
- They became less interested in participating in training and development programs, either for themselves or for other employees.
- Their work productivity went down; they seemed to be well aware of it, but they didn't care.

Now there can be other reasons for these behaviors.

Some of these changes might be due to stress in people's personal lives (the death of a parent, personal bankruptcy or credit problems, an impending divorce, the serious illness of a child), in which case the supervisor who notices the behavior would be well advised to intervene and offer any assistance the company can provide.

But having eliminated such personal reasons for behavioral changes, Gardner's research showed that if employees were demonstrating at least six of these 10 behaviors, his statistical formula predicted with 80% accuracy that they were about to leave the organization.

Gardner said the list of indicators that might tip off a manager or supervisor that someone was thinking of leaving wasn't surprising.

What he did not expect, however, were the behaviors that did not make the list of sure tipoffs of impending turnover.

"People having a lot of doctor's appointments, showing up to work in a suit, or leaving a resume on the printer were the kind of signs that dropped off the list," Gardner said. "You might think that someone who starts showing up to work late and taking lots of sick days might be about to leave, but those weren't unique behaviors that applied only to the quitters."

In today's world, when you're investing a lot of time and money in your top performers, knowing the telltale signs of cases of impending turnover might help managers find ways to keep people on board.

"It appears that a person's attitude can create behaviors that are hard to disguise," Gardner said. "As the grass starts to look greener on the other side of the fence to you, chances are that others will soon notice that you've lost your focus."

You can read Gardner's full research report here:

www.usu.edu/today/index.cfm?id=53616