

## The Work Should be Challenging; The Work Environment Shouldn't be

Your organization's top talent is at risk if the work *isn't* challenging or the work environment *is*. If both are out of balance, assume your top people are working on their resumes.

The fast-paced environment of many companies is ripe for creating a culture in which the day-to-day work experience of employees is overlooked. The following five issues are common causes of employee dissatisfaction. Top talent is particularly susceptible because they often have higher standards and are confident they can go elsewhere. As you read through these, ask yourself how you rate in each of the areas, and who at your company might be stewing over one or more of them right now:

### **Acknowledge their contributions**

Sound obvious? The truth is that many companies absorb their employee's ideas without acknowledging them. If your employees were given an anonymous survey today – a few questions about getting credit and being acknowledged – how would you fare?

### **Shield them from abusive clients**

Whoever came up with the now legendary expression, "The customer is always right" was not trying to retain top talent. And if you have been following it blindly, consider taking another look. Clients are often wrong – and never more so than when they are abusive to your employees or vent their frustrations on someone who doesn't deserve it. Sticking up for an employee to a client is unquestionably one of the single most powerful ways to build employee loyalty.

### **Avoid giving top talent "filler" work on low-level tasks**

This is a particularly insidious problem because management often doesn't realize just how much of this is occurring. It very well may be more than the "just from time to time" that you think it is. An architect client of mine recently lost a senior designer for this very reason. The employee had mentioned it, but it never quite made it onto his manager's radar – until he quit. The exit interview was the first time they really heard him.

### **Avoid work schedule surprises**

Countless employees in many industries have told me that it's not the overtime that bothers them – that's just part of the game - but being surprised by it late afternoon when they have made other plans or are just about to leave makes them feel disregarded. I had one client who was well known for "dropping by" his employees' desks late afternoon to alert them that they would need to stay late to help him plan for a morning meeting. This happened so frequently that people would cringe when they saw him coming. They gave it a name: the partner's name was Wilson – and they called it "getting Wilsoned."

### **Don't tie them up in pointless meetings**

Boring meetings are so prevalent it has become a cliché. A common belief is that it is efficient to bring everyone together for big project status meetings. These would be fine if they didn't so often turn into a drawn out problem-solving sessions that were only interesting to those involved in the particular project being discussed. Nobody is happy in these meetings, but your top talent – who are often high

performing “A” personality types - find them unbearable. Nothing makes them walk away shaking their head at the ineffectiveness of your company like wasting two hours in a useless meeting.

Some of these issues may seem impossible to address: meetings run long, things come up at the last minute, and sometimes abusive clients take a bite out of an employee and get away with it. All true, but as with other management goals, you don't have to make these things perfect, just better. In this case, good enough so that your work environment isn't unworkably challenging for your top people.

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