



Turnover is Not a Problem

“Ha!” you say. “For someone to make a statement like that, they obviously haven’t worked in the real world and certainly have never had to run a company.” Well, let me assure you. In my past I’ve not only run companies, but spent many years in one of the most notorious industries for turnover – the restaurant industry.

Don’t get me wrong, I understand and appreciate the challenges that turnover creates. Turnover causes a drop in productivity, lower profits, inconsistent quality, and certainly creates work overload. In addition, turnover results in a lack of motivation, a lack of enthusiasm, apathy, and a lack of teamwork. But here’s the question...

Are the challenges I just raised problems or symptoms? In the context of our discussion of turnover, most people would agree that they’re all symptoms of our turnover challenge. Turnover caused each of these shortfalls, which leads us to the core question:

Is turnover a problem or a symptom?

Turnover is a symptom.

But what is turnover a symptom of? You may argue that turnover is a symptom of a weak workforce – unmotivated people, apathetic, too small of a labor pool, etc. I believe, however, that turnover is caused by other factors. Turnover is related to leadership. Turnover is a symptom of leadership problems. Some of these leadership-related problems are: lack of purpose, lack of integrity, absence of a plan for developing people, poor communications, and treating people as objects instead of people.

Let’s discuss whether these factors really do cause turnover. I always suggest that clients use their own experience as their best example. Have you ever worked for a company just to earn a living? A job where you really didn’t care about the work or the company? I’d guess that virtually everyone has been in that situation at one time or another. You may even be in that situation right now. When you were in that job, were you on the lookout for a better opportunity? Did you leave the company to take a job just to make more money? (... and then repeat the whole scenario once more?) When a company and a job lack purpose, turnover occurs.

Have you ever worked for someone who lacked integrity? Someone who would say one thing and do another? Someone who promised to do something but never did? Someone who took the credit and placed the blame? Unfortunately, I’d have to guess that each of us has had that kind of boss at one time or another. When you were in that situation, did you continue to do your work? Of course you did. Was your work accurate and correct? Of course it was. Did you take the initiative on new projects for the benefit of the company? Maybe not. Go the extra mile to make a difference? Hmmm... Did you leave the company at the first opportunity? Point made. When an individual or company lacks integrity, turnover occurs.



Ever work in a company where the prospects of advancement or expansion of responsibilities were nonexistent? Someplace where you knew that you weren't going anywhere? Stay very long? That's my point. Without an opportunity for growth, learning, expansion of responsibility, and increase in personal value, people leave. When people aren't developed, turnover takes place.

Have you ever worked in a company where major changes were "sprung" on you like a surprise attack? Where work was assigned to you and after you completed it, you found out you had done the wrong thing? What happens when people don't communicate effectively? Poor communication leads to misunderstandings, conflict, de-motivation, and stress. What do misunderstanding, conflict, de-motivation and stress lead to? You got it – turnover.

And then comes the most insidious issue of them all - treating people as objects rather than people. The truth is that from time to time we all fall into this trap to one degree or another. I'm talking about how we regard people. Again, use your own experience as your best example. Have you ever had someone say something kind or positive to you, but you sensed that they were being "phony"? They used the right words, but you could tell their words were insincere? Did you believe the words or your sense of the person? No questions about it – we believe our sense of things and people. When we are faced with someone who says one thing but means another, does our respect for that person increase, decrease or stay the same? Clearly it decreases. Not only do we rely on our sense of the person – our intuition – but we form opinions about them based on our insights. Have you ever worked for someone who you lost respect for? Did you stay at that job very long? When people treat other people as objects, turnover occurs.

Purpose, integrity, developing people, effective communications, and regarding people as people are all leadership issues. Exceptional leadership inspires the best effort in others, and when people give their best effort, the result is a high performance organization.

When you and your organization have a clearly defined Purpose, you attract and retain the talent you need. When you and your organization have integrity, you build trust and loyalty. When you and your organization are committed to developing people, people become the best they can be. When you and your organization communicate effectively, conflict and tension diminish and cooperation increases. When you and your organization work to treat people as people, they appreciate it and reciprocate.

Turnover isn't a problem - it's a symptom caused by leadership problems. Fortunately, the problems can be solved, and *you* have the power to make that difference. Strive to become the best leader you can be.