

Why Do Employees Stay?

By M.J. Clark

In an executive coaching session this morning, a client told me that from one of Marcus Buckingham's books, the thing he found most profound was the notion that how you feel about your company is a direct reflection of how you feel about your boss. Because my client is a leader and manager in his company, he said he keeps that in mind when he interacts with those who report to him.

Until recently, research has focused on the fact that the reason most employees leave their jobs has something to do with their boss – either a bad relationship with that person, lack of respect, etc. I recently read an article from the Foster School of Business in the University of Washington that I found very interesting. The Foster School has partnered with researchers at Truman State University to study, instead, why people choose to *stay* in a position.

What they found is that people don't only leave because of a negative relationship with their boss. They also leave for unrelated issues, such as changes in their lives that warrant a subsequent job change, like their spouse taking a job in another state, or reasons that come out of the blue, like an unexpected job offer that's too good to refuse.

Wendy Harman, an assistant professor of business at Truman State University in Kirksville, Mo., and her colleagues call the reason why people quit their jobs the "unfolding model," and they call the reason why workers stay "job embeddedness."

The unfolding model happens as the result of a "shock," such as a fight with a boss or an unexpected job offer, that causes the employee to make a decision to either stay or go. Of course, this isn't easy. The employee must weigh many factors, such as the pay differential, investments they've made in the company and costs they might incur, among other things.

Job embeddedness is defined by Harman and her colleagues as "a web of forces that cause one to feel he or she would not leave a job," such as how strongly they are linked to others and activities in the workplace, and what sacrifices they may have to make if they leave.

Thus, the researchers believe that helping build a sense of community among employees can prevent them from quitting. So how do we build a culture that brings out the best in our employees so they want to stay?

These researchers believe that to help people feel connected to the company and their community, employers should allow them to work in groups or on teams in which they are depended upon for success, and invite all employees to do community service projects together outside of work. In addition, you should hire those whose values and goals match the company's.

Harman and her colleagues believe that the more a person would have to sacrifice to leave a company, and the more of a good fit they feel within the company, the more embedded that person becomes. And that's what makes them stay!