



# WHY GOOD PEOPLE LEAVE GOOD JOBS

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“The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”  
—*Blaise Pascal*

“A man always has two reasons for doing anything,  
a good reason and the real reason.”  
—*J. P. Morgan*

**A**ccording to Compdata Surveys *BenchmarkPro*, 2012 survey results show the average turnover rate for employers in 2012 was 15.2%. There are 7.5 million business establishments in the United States with an average size of 16 people. Turnover rates differ by industry, from hospitality at 33.7% to 16.5% in banking and 10.8% in insurance, with the utilities industry reporting the lowest average total turnover rate at 6.5%.

Most employers think they really know why people leave their organization. But as J.P. Morgan stated . . . there are reasons and then there are the real reasons. Since our organization was founded in 1952, we have literally interviewed hundreds of thousands of candidates on a face-to-face basis. Thus we have developed a comprehensive understanding of why people leave their jobs. Recruiters, especially very experienced ones, hear the real reasons!

Interestingly enough, the reasons below probably also contribute to why businesses fail. In 1973 the average business in the United States was 58-years-old. In 2009 the average age had declined to 15 years. Companies come and go faster than ever before . . . probably for the same reasons their employees do.

So here are the Top 10 reasons why good people leave good jobs . . . not the reasons they give you, but the real reasons.



**#1 SPLIT-BRAIN DISORDER.** It is a psychotic disorder, believed to be an imbalance of dopamine and serotonin where the right brain and left brain don't communicate. Split brain patients cannot combine information of both brain hemispheres. The right side of the brain can't give a name to what the left side of the brain sees. So the patient makes up a story or a reason that may have nothing to do with reality. For example a patient with split brain disorder is shown a picture of a chicken and a snowy field in separate visual fields and asked to choose from a list of words that best associate with the pictures. The patient chooses a chicken foot to associate with the chicken and a shovel to associate with the snow. However, when asked to reason why the patient chose the shovel, the response would relate to the chicken, something like "the shovel is for cleaning up the chicken coop."

"I know you think you understand what you thought I said,  
but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what  
I meant."

*—Alan Greenspan*

Companies often run the same way. It is a form of business schizophrenia. Their "right brain" and their "left brain" don't see the world the same way. The company rationalizes the different views by coming up with a story to be what they're not. Employees are confused and are never really sure what vision they are operating under. Good people leave.

One of the worst displays of this disconnect is when there is a gap between espoused values—what we say is important—and our enacted values—how we actually behave. "What we say around here and what we do are totally different . . . We say

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that we are ‘customer oriented’ but management really doesn’t care about the customer . . . They tell us we are important here, but they don’t treat us that way . . . They tell us to make our own decisions, but then micro-manage us.” When company actions don’t follow the company mantras, trust takes a big hit and good people leave.

**#2 LACK OF APPRECIATION AND RESPECT.** Even some successful companies forget to give appreciation and respect to the people who work for them. It’s so easy to do. Treating people as respected individuals as well as simply communicating appreciation for everything they do goes a long way. When people don’t get appreciation and respect they leave.

We all want to be appreciated, but appreciation needs to be customized. Each of us has our own language of appreciation. Managers need to get to know each employee as an individual and customize the expression of appreciation in a way that the employee will not only hear the words, but actually *feel* appreciated.

Recently, author Gary Chapman of *The Five Love Languages* published a new book that extends the application of the love languages to the workplace by discussing the languages of appreciation.

The book is based on the Five Love Languages framework and focuses on a need we all have: the need to be appreciated. We can understand this by placing it in the context of the various need theories of motivation we teach in Organizational Behavior courses. You’re probably familiar with one of these models: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. According to these models, a need is any perceived psychological or physiological

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deficiency. When we experience a deficiency, our behavior is driven to eliminate that deficiency. When the need is met, it no longer motivates our behavior.

Unlike the needs in Maslow's hierarchy that go away when they are satisfied, I think the need to be appreciated remains constant. But like feeling loved, each of us has our own unique way that we want that appreciation expressed. Successful leaders understand this and work hard to understand the "appreciation language" of their followers. In fact, these leaders become students of their followers and customize the way they express their appreciation.

So what are the *5 Languages of Appreciation*?

1. ***Words of Affirmation:*** These can be expressed verbally or in handwritten notes.
2. ***Quality Time:*** Spending time with the person, asking—and actually listening to their response—how they're doing, just dropping by their office and giving them focused attention.
3. ***Acts of Service:*** This would include pitching in to help on a project or sharing the load on an important deadline-driven assignment.
4. ***Tangible Gifts:*** Rather than generic awards and plaques, these gifts should be customized for the individual. What would be meaningful to them? Concert tickets to see their favorite band; World Series Tickets?
5. ***Touch:*** For obvious reasons, we don't do this in the workplace.

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**#3 LACK OF PERSONAL GROWTH . . . ADDRESSING THE INNER WORK LIFE.** Intrinsic motivation . . . personal growth . . . the ability to feel good about your contribution to an organization and progress in your work are more important than title, money or prestige. Most people don't even recognize their own need for nurturing their "inner work life." When managers, from the CEO on down, think that people are only motivated by money, recognition, promotion etc. they miss the point. When people feel like they are genuinely contributing and personally growing as a result of their work, they are more content in their job. When intrinsic motivation, work progress and a person's inner work life are not addressed by a company, good people leave.

When Tom Peters and Bob Waterman wrote *In Search of Excellence*, they identified two important drivers of employee behavior. They said people want to feel that they are working on something important, something that is bigger than self, and they want to be recognized—appreciated—for their contributions. When this happens, employees feel their work is meaningful and significant.

**#4 BEING KEPT IN THE DARK . . . DOUBT, UNCERTAINTY and FEAR.** Some companies and people are just secretive. They don't feel an obligation to let people know what's going on. It's amazing how many employees will stick with the company even through difficult times if they are aware of what's going on. Open communication breeds trust; silence and lack of transparency are a breeding ground for distrust.

We hear it all the time from candidates, "I'm not sure what's going on, but it can't be good. I need to leave."



**#5 BEING TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF.** When people *feel* they are going the extra mile, working harder than average and they aren't acknowledged for it . . . either by recognition, praise or money . . . they feel violated and taken advantage of. When people are taken advantage of, they leave.

**#6 ARROGANT, ADVERSARIAL, MISTRUSTING CULTURE.** Some companies thrive this way...but few survive. It's the, "If it weren't for me/us, you wouldn't have a job . . . What did you do for me today? . . . You know, you could be fired at any time! . . . You are lucky to be working here . . . We don't trust you to do anything right! . . . I/we are the only ones who know anything . . . I don't trust anyone." attitude. "Good people don't tolerate it for long. They leave.

**#7 UNCLEAR GOALS and RESPONSIBILITIES.** It's the "What are we doing today?" syndrome. "Did the CEO change his/her mind *again*? . . . I thought we were supposed to \_\_\_\_\_ and now after four months, you tell me we are gonna \_\_\_\_\_!" These firms have no *system* of doing business. No *process*. When a company's goals and system are unclear, employee responsibilities are unclear and ever changing. After only so much lack of clarity, good folks leave.

There's another side of this, though. Today's marketplace is complex and increasingly dynamic. Oftentimes, the assumptions that underpin our strategies change before we can fully implement our plans. In order to survive, we must adjust. The key is for the leaders of the organization to explain—through open communication (See # 4)—why we're making this course adjustment. When we share the big picture with employees, trust is enhanced. When we're open with them they are forgiving, and their commitment is enhanced.

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**#8 EGO AND GREED** These attributes are the demise of most businesses. The owners/managers communicate, “We are the center of the universe. This whole place revolves around us/me and we know what we are doing! . . . We’ll get our profits and pay you whatever we can get away with.” Firms like this often become successful with one or two endeavors and then think they are invincible . . . that they can do anything in business and it will be successful. They read their own press clippings. Their ego is bigger than their game. It goes to their head. Companies without *humility* lose lots of good employees.

**#9 CULTURAL MISMATCH.** It’s like hiring an accountant to be a salesman, or vice versa, or hiring a salesperson and automatically expecting them to entertain customers at strip bars. It is hiring a non-Christian or a marginal Christian at a clearly Christian company and trying to convert them on a daily basis. It is a French, European, Asian, etc. company hiring an American and making it clear that Americans have no idea what they are doing when it comes to business. Good employees pick up on this mismatch and leave.

At the heart of this mismatch issue is the concept of “FIT.” There are several dimensions of fit and each of them is important. The first dimension has to do with having the skills that match the requirements for the job. For example, having a degree in accounting is most likely necessary for a financial analyst position.

The second level of “fit” has to do with the rewards of the job satisfying the employee’s needs. This actually has two parts. First the tangible rewards that the job provides must meet the tangible needs of the employee. Tangible needs and rewards



include salary and benefits. But there is more. There are intangible needs that must be met by the job. For instance, people have a need for variety. Just the thought of doing the same task repeatedly drives some folks crazy. Most people also like autonomy—setting their own pace and having the freedom to approach their work from their own unique perspective.

The third dimension of the fit model has to do with values. Personal values must be aligned with the organization's values, or at least not in direct competition. Employees will leave companies when they realize that their personal values don't line up with the values of the organization. It isn't a good vs. bad issue; rather, it's just an issue of "fit."

**#10 MONEY.** Money complaints are normally just a symptom of one of the problems listed above. Unless someone is being grossly underpaid . . . and we mean grossly . . . to the point where they are being cheated, people normally don't leave a job over money. When they resign, they'll tell us that they are leaving over money, but it usually isn't so. How do we know? At least twice a month we get a call from a candidate who is threatening to leave his or her job, and upon going in to resign receives a "counter-offer" to stay in their present job for more money. Once the "high" of the new money wears off . . . usually after three months or so . . . all of the reasons that made them want to leave in the first place begin to surface again and they do just that . . . leave. Money may be a symptom, but it's rarely the real reason people leave a job.