

I Quit! Overworked employees are fed up: Survey finds 8 out of 10 people want a new job

By Leslie Haggin Geary, CNN/Money Staff Writer

Ready to quit? You have plenty of company.

Many employees are overworked, stressed out, fed up -- and eager to quit their jobs once the economy picks up. In fact, worker angst is so pronounced that it has surprised even the most tuned-in human resource professionals.

Consider, for example, that more than eight in 10 workers plan to look for a new job when the economy heats up, according to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Professionals. While there's a difference between looking for a new gig and actually jumping ship, that kind of number is "very, very high," says SHRP spokesman Frank Scanlon.

How did things get so bad?

To be sure, the economy hasn't helped. Cash-strapped employers have been cutting back on benefits like health care, paid vacations and retirement benefits.

Belt tightening is one thing; greed is another. In an era of Enron, mutual fund scandals and ludicrous CEO pay packages, employees know the difference, says Jeff Taylor, founder and CEO of Monster.com.

"Companies behaving badly" have been all too common during the downturn, according to Taylor.

"You have the greed of executive management and great inequities from your lowest-paid worker to your highest-paid worker," he says. "Companies are not giving out raises. Benefits have been cut. That's an environment where the employers call the shots."

The threat of pink slips has prompted plenty of people to work scared and to give everything to their jobs. Overtime isn't that uncommon anymore. Nearly 40 percent of

all workers spend at least 50 hours on the job per week.

"Employees have hunkered down through the downturn," said the SHRP's Scanlon.

"They're going to start looking aggressively."

Heading for the door

Take the case of David Garrison, 40, a facilities manager who worked for an oil company for 20 years before he finally called it quits.

Pulling 60-hour weeks was normal for the Los Angeles father of two. That's because he was expected to do much of the work of five other peers who had been fired. The message: Don't complain or you'll lose your job, too. So Garrison kept his mouth shut - and paid a price.

By the time he did quit a little over a year ago, he had to swallow anti-anxiety prescriptions to get through the day. When

Job Stress: By the Numbers

83%	of workers plan to look for a new gig when the economy heats up.
35%	of "top performing" corporate employees are at "high risk" of leaving their jobs.
60%	of workers feel pressure to work too much.
83%	of employees want more time with their families.
56%	of workers are either somewhat or completely dissatisfied with their jobs.

Sources: Society for Human Resource Professionals, Sibson Consulting, Gallup Poll, Monster.com

he did care for himself -- and took a second sick day within a six-month period -- he was called in for a "counseling" session by his employer, who warned him not to take too much time away.

"It was infuriating," he recalls.

Infuriating but not uncommon, judging by the e-mail postings on worker-gear Web sites like Ihatemyjob.com that have flourished in recent years as a way for beleaguered employees to vent.

Meanwhile, labor-friendly movements - such as the Center for a New American Dream's effort to simplify lives and the Work To Live Web site, which exhorts workers to lobby lawmakers for change - are gaining momentum.

"I get flooded with e-mails from people, and you get a sense of the desperation," says Work to Live's founder and author Joe Robinson. "People have been traumatized by the last 15 years of downsizing and the last few years of recession. Everyone's afraid they'll be next."

The high cost of desperation

"In the last 15 years I've had a total of four weeks of vacation," writes one woman in a typical posting found on the Work to Live site. "We receive no paid vacation, no paid holidays and no paid sick leave. . . .I used to have three people in my office doing

what I do. Now there is just me. . . . I can't keep going like this."

Now there may be a glimmer of hope for some. The most recent job report from the Labor Department shows that employers are finally adding to their payrolls. And human resource managers are bracing for a stampede.

Gerald Ledford, senior vice president at Sibson Consulting, notes that if 16 percent of workers do leave their jobs - as his firm predicts - that will match the high turnover rates of the late 1990's, when employees hop scotched from job to job.

"It's a very expensive problem," says Ledford.

For example, a national clothing chain must sell 3,000 pairs of \$35 khakis to cover the price of replacing a salesperson who quits, including recruiting, training and lost productivity.

The tab to replace a typical white-collar middle manager runs about \$100,000.

"We're a few good breaths away from being back at a lower unemployment rate," says Monster's Jeff Taylor. "Companies can limit their exposure by saying 'Thank you' and recognizing the good work people have done for them.

"But I think generally this is where companies have a pretty big miss in this area." =