

New Hires Often Seek a Quick Divorce

By Brian Amble

Whether you call it "job shock" or the "six month itch", the fact is that a significant proportion of employees head for the door almost as soon as they have walked in, with many organizations losing as many as a quarter of their new hires within the first year.

A survey of more than 2,000 HR and training executives by Boston-based consulting firm, Novations Group, has revealed that a third of employers experience turnover of between 10 and 25 per cent, while for a further one in 10 organizations, first-year departures can approach an astonishing 50 per cent.

While turnover for remainder employers (some 54 per cent), is a more manageable 10 per cent or less, Novations Consultant Tim Vigue said that the incidence of hiring failures is nevertheless startling, even to experienced selection and assessment professionals.

"Because there's no reliable baseline data we don't know for sure if the findings mark a trend or whether first-year departures have been a pressing problem for a long time. But we think they're a not a new issue."

"It appears that individuals and hiring managers are not sharing enough of the kind of information that would help each side determine if there is a good match," he added.

"This makes it a lot more difficult for new hires to get up and running in the new job and frequently results in new hires quitting."

Tim Vigue's suspicion that the issue of job shock is not a new one is confirmed by other research. For example, a February 2007 study by talent management firm Kenexa found a sharp downward pattern in employee engagement levels once someone has been hired for more than six months.

The survey of more than 840,000 workers in multi-national companies found that for the first six months, the vast majority - nearly three quarters - are generally excited and engaged about their job.

But from month six through to the eighteenth month, satisfaction levels decline sharply, and by the end of their second year, many are actively looking for pastures new.

Meanwhile, a 2006 study of worker attrition rates by Sirota Survey Intelligence found that employees with less than two years of service voluntarily leave at an average rate of about 20 per cent per year, while those with more than two years tenure quit at an average rate of only half this.

Sirota's survey of almost 47,000 employees found that almost six out of 10 of all those who quit in any given year have been in their job for less than two years.

The reasons that so many new hires leave an employer in their first year are telling.

According to the Novations research, almost half (48 per cent) said that their departure was hastened by unrealistic expectations of the job and the organisation - something that employers could and should have avoided with an honest and open recruitment process.

Meanwhile, four out of 10 said that their failure to grasp "how things get done" was a big factor, while a third said that poor communications with their immediate manager played a part.

Failure to develop a sense of belonging and purpose was cited as a factor by a quarter, with one in five disillusioned because they did not understand the link between their job and the organization's goals.

Tim Vigue added that the study underscores the need for the organization to be realistic about what a job entails.

"The employer has the responsibility to be clear and straightforward. Not to do so proves to be self-defeating."

He also observed that not developing a "sense of belonging" ranked high among the reasons for failed hirings.

"One-quarter of our respondents pointed to this real human issue...the need for new hires to bond with co-workers and the direction the company is taking. The finding underlines what all HR professionals know...that people stay with an organization only if they feel connected."

Brian Amble is a contributing editor for Inc. Magazine.