

## Successful Supervisor Part 56

### Reducing Turnover

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

In any organization, voluntary turnover is a kind of waste that needs to be held to an absolute minimum. This is true for all levels in an organization and can be particularly important for supervisors.

Reducing employee turnover is not rocket science; however, many companies struggle with very high turnover year after year. The common denominator of high turnover in organizations comes back to leadership issues. The old saying that “People do not leave organizations, they leave their supervisor” is generally accurate.

If you study the best companies to work for worldwide, you will discover they have a much lower turnover rate than the average numbers. I believe having the kind of culture where employees are locked in with no desire to leave for any reason is a sustainable competitive advantage. It is easy to achieve if you follow the 10 rules listed below.

### **10 Low Cost Ways a Supervisor Can Drastically Reduce Turnover**

- 1. Develop People** - Organizations that focus on employee development enjoy higher employee satisfaction, which leads to lower turnover. If each employee has a concrete development plan that is reviewed at least annually and contains a variety of growth opportunities, the employee will have little reason to look for greener pastures elsewhere.
- 2. Recognize Good Performance** - Reinforcing people for doing good work lets them know they are appreciated. Tangible and intangible rewards are a great way to show appreciation for workers who excel. This improves morale if done well. However, understand that reinforcement can be a minefield if it is not handled properly. Make sure employees receive sincere appreciation by supervision on a continuing basis.
- 3. Build Trust** - By extending trust to employees, supervisors demonstrate their willingness to support them. This pays off in terms of higher trust on the part of employees toward the organization. There is a whole science on how to build trust. By creating a safe environment, more trust in an organization will lead to lower turnover.

4. **Reduce Boredom** - Employees who are underutilized, tend to get bored and restless. If there is a vacuum of activity, people often get into mischief. It is important for supervisors to craft job duties and responsibilities such that people are actively engaged in the work every day.
5. **Communicate More** - In nearly every survey on employee satisfaction, the issue of communication surfaces as either the number one or number two complaint. Communication needs to be ubiquitous and consistent. It is not enough to have a monthly shift news letter or an occasional town hall meeting. Communication needs to take many different forms and be a constant priority for the supervisor.
6. **Cross Train** - Employees, who have been trained on several different jobs recognize they are of higher value to the organization and tend to be less inclined to leave. Along with the pleasure of having more variety of work, employees appreciate the ability to take on additional skills. Having good bench strength allows the organization to function well, even during times of high vacation or illness.
7. **Don't Overtax** - During lean economic times, companies have a need to stretch resources as much as possible. Many organizations exceed the elastic limit of what employees can be expected to maintain long term. This leads to burnout and people leaving for health reasons or just plain quitting in disgust over the abuse. It is important for supervisors to assess carefully how far resources can be stretched, because going beyond the elastic limit guarantees a high level of employee turnover. I believe this rule is habitually violated in many organizations, and they pay for it big time. Stretching people too far is a false economy.
8. **Keep It Light** - When managers apply constant pressure to squeeze out the last drop of productivity, they often go over the line, and it becomes counter productive. If leaders grind people down to a stump with constant pressure for perfection and ever higher productivity, the quality of work life suffers. Employees can tolerate a certain amount of this for some time, but eventually they will break down. It is smart to set aggressive goals, but very important to have employees believe the stretch goals are attainable. One good way to provide this assurance is to have the employees themselves participate in setting the goals. The best companies find ways to work in a little fun somewhere, even (and especially) in high pressure situations.
9. **Feedback Performance** - there needs to be a constant flow of information on how all employees are doing in each area. People who are kept in the dark about their performance become disillusioned and cranky. The simple kindness of letting people know how they are doing on a daily or weekly basis pays off in terms of lower turnover.
10. **Train Group Leaders** - All levels of supervision need to be highly proficient at creating an environment where the culture is upbeat, positive, and has high trust.

This does not happen by accident, or simply by desire. It takes work and lots of emphasis by the supervisor.

These are 10 ways in which supervisors can lower the level of turnover in their organization. The magic here is not any new discovery; but the consistent application of these principles will make a huge difference in any organization. The good news is that the items mentioned above are not very expensive. They are all common sense. Too bad they are often not common practice.

*This is a part in a series of articles on "Successful Supervision." The entire series can be viewed on [www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision](http://www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision) or on this blog.*

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