

Employment: Job-Hoppers Disengaged: Something to Fear?

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If you currently work, are happy in your position and are not actively looking for jobs elsewhere, then you may consider yourself unique in the current labor market realities. Why? Let's see how it's working out.

Ask yourself this: what constitutes your motivation to perform better than most — is it money, title, proximity of office to home, work itself? Obviously, the answer is likely to be more complex than only one thing. Thus, you can perceive your motivation as a multi-dimensional thing, not static either. Priorities change, you get accustomed to what you do, and your initial fervor wears off a bit. Your motivation gets affected. You are a professional, of course, and you still work hard — your performance outshines your KPIs — but yes, you begin to wonder. Wonder what it'll lead to when your current job no longer motivates you. Can you own up to the fact publicly? It might be fraught with risks. It is clear that on the saturated markets opportunities are few, and your CEO will have a slew of eligible candidates for any role that comes up. If you try for a promotion once and fail, will you be as happy as you once were in your current role? Maybe you will, and maybe your working hard will turn to hardly working. Thus, your engagement will vary according to what's happening in your life and that of the organization you work for.

So it becomes evident that in order to keep up the output and increase efficiency, an employer must regularly monitor and control engagement levels of the employees. But a cow doesn't fatten if you just weigh it often. The reverse is true: you take a cow from feeding, you draw less milk. Likewise, by establishing engagement benchmarks, the employer generates expectations from the employees. Expectations that things will change in a way each employee deems favorable, beneficial, lucrative. These expectations will come in all shapes and sizes, from totally realistic to blown out of all proportions. And the deuce of it is that the employer will be hard put to answer definitely if realistic expectations will only come

from the best workers (like in "dreamers don't perform"). Not necessarily.

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Let's take a look at this from another angle. You've worked in your current position for two years, achieved a lot and now you expect another challenge. But your employer tells you to stay in the role for another two years. What is your response going to be? You might acquiesce and stay put or you might start looking for another job. If the latter is the case, take a look at your CV. If what you see is a path of one who changed jobs every year or two in order to advance, you must feel it looks attractive. But in the eyes of some recruiters and almost all potential employers you are a patent job-hopper. You can expect to get a raise, but dishearteningly modest. Moreover, the process of interviewing will extend over a period of months, if you apply for a managerial role. A bit disappointed, you return to what you now think of as your own little bog.

And what if you do get a job offer from some other employer? Have you ever considered what the best retention tool in your organization is? Unless you work for a company where the importance of HR is recognized on all levels, it'll likely be a pep-talk from your boss coming on top of a counter-offer, which may or may not be as good as the offer that you have already got.

A good thing for you will be if you don't let a pat on the back and the promise of a glorious future detain you. And if you stay, don't think your employer must jump for joy. A worker who tried to quit once will try again. Take notice of those sidelong glances your boss throws at you from time to time. He obviously thinks you're a weak link now. Can you be sure he's not right in his assumption? If you choose to stay, you must promise yourself that you'll take good care to keep up your engagement and not slide into a boring routine and just wait for another opportune moment to jump ship. That's a quick and ineluctable way to deteriorate into a mediocrity with overblown (or busted) ambitions.

The employers can complain of ever-rising labor costs, lack of available talent and unsatisfactory engagement levels. It's all true. When employees get in the habit of getting chunky bonuses and raises each year, plus a promotion every second year, things get hard and crunchy for the employer. If employees want to leave, performance will slip, output and revenues will suffer. And it's best to let the disengaged ones leave if there's no chance to get their enthusiasm back. A wise employer will take good care of keeping the best ones, though, and not only with counter-offers either. The top-performers always know what keeps them going and will gladly pinpoint the things important to them if the employer cares

to ask and listen. Oh, and there's no such thing as a job-hopper when it comes to working employees — it's only a matter of performance, really.

And if you feel unappreciated in your company, take a look at the market, talk to colleagues, see if it's any different with them. Just remember: quitting a job is simple; finding a job after you hopped a few will be a much tougher proposition these days. So it's best to keep fully engaged until you find a job based on what's in your own heart.

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