# Employers need to wake up to loyalty nightmare

*by Michael_Kinsman*

Workplace studies probably can come to any conclusion you choose.

But Walker Information of Indianapolis has staked out a reputation for carefully and accurately evaluating the mood of the American work force in recent years. Every two years, it examines the level of loyalty among workers.

This year's study signifies a watershed trend: For the first time, the rising number of disloyal employees now overshadows loyal employees.

This is an employer's nightmare.

This is a fact of life employers and management wish they never knew. Perhaps they have been looking the other way in recent years, mindful that trouble was brewing but reluctant to face up to it.

Walker reports that 34 percent of workers are loyal to their companies, the same as two years ago. At the same time, though, workers likely to leave a company has risen to 36 percent, from 31 percent two years ago.

Walker says that's the highest level achieved since they started their loyalty studies in 1999.

"Employers are faced with a situation where the number of employees causing a negative drain on the organization outweighs those who are working to positively support it," said Chris Woolard, senior consultant for Walker.

"With more than a third of employees classified as high risk (those likely to leave within two years), the results of our study signal concern as to how the negative attitudes often characteristic of this group will affect organizations - and their ability to compete successfully - down the road."

You have to remember that underlying the 36 percent of disconnected workers are another 23 percent who feel trapped in their jobs with no prospects of getting out.

The impact of this can stagger a company. Walker reports loyalty has a substantial impact on how employees behave and perform daily.

It says that 81 percent of those deemed loyal are likely to execute the company's strategy, compared to just 38 percent of the high-risk and trapped employees.

Loyalty is closely associated to the experiences individuals have in the work force. Walker's survey finds that loyalty builds the first 10 years of employment and then begins to spiral downward.

Employers need to pay attention to the experiences that drive loyalty in the workplace. Walker has identified the five most important factors that build loyalty as fairness, care and concern for employees, trust in employees, workers having a feel of accomplishment and day-to-day satisfaction among employees.

If there is a secret combination to build or rekindle loyalty, employers will have to think seriously about those factors.

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