Employers fail to take stress into account

by Michael_Kinsman

Everyone seems to know someone who can walk into their workplace, disrupt it, create turmoil and calmly walk away while the blood pressure of others soars.

Often the perpetrator has no idea of the problems he or she has created, or the long-term damage that results from that.

Now, think about that disruptive individual, and instead of thinking of them as a person, think of them as a company.

The inability of companies to understand workplace stress is documented in a new worldwide study by the consulting firm Watson Wyatt Worldwide. The study of 13,000 workers in medium-size and large companies around the world shows that stress is not being recognized adequately by these companies.

Watson Wyatt's study is straightforward. It reveals that workers identify stress as the primary reason they leave jobs, while companies don't even list it among the top five reasons.

"Worldwide, the frenetic pace of modern business is taking its toll on employees," says Watson Wyatt's Adam Sorenson. "There's no question that employees are more likely to leave or speak badly of their workplace if they feel overburdened."

The survey finds that employers believe the No. 1 reason that employees leave is because they aren't happy with their base pay, followed by unhappiness of over career development opportunities and promotion prospects. Relationships with supervisors and work-life balance round out the five leading reasons, according to employers.

In the same survey, 52 percent of companies said they are having difficulty retaining top-performing employees while 56 percent say they have trouble keeping workers with critical skills.

This is a classic case of denying reality. Employers are causing their own problems and they don't even seem to know it.

It's obvious from this survey that workers are feeling more stress in their jobs than their employers think they are.

Because of the high cost of recruiting employees, you might think that employers would be more sensitive to why their workers leave and be more willing to address the work situations that lead to those departures. After all, turnover is an expensive proposition.

Watson Wyatt suggests that stress-related issues are so severe that companies need to take a comprehensive look at organizational design, job design and performance expectations. It encourages employers to be aggressive, but realistic in their expectations.

If staffing levels are not appropriate or training adequate in the eyes of workers, stress levels will continue to be too high.

The issue for the employer is simple: Either employers listen to workers when they say the stress is too much, or they simply pay more in recruitment and training costs when they get new workers.

The choice rests with the employer.

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