

The profile of a quitter

by Michael_Kinsman

Nobody likes a quitter, but why do companies keep hiring them?

That's one of the questions industrial-organizational psychologist Ryan Zimmerman has been asking himself lately.

Zimmerman, a management professor at Texas A&M University, has been studying employee turnover and the personalities of workers, and discovered that some people are more likely to quit their jobs while others are likely to remain employed.

"There is proven research that shows certain people are more likely to be habitual quitters, where others will tend to stay at a job no matter what," says Zimmerman.

He might have just opened up a treasure chest for employers. In 2007, about 24 percent of American workers were expected to leave their jobs voluntarily. That doesn't account for others who were fired or laid off.

But when you consider the costs of recruiting and training workers, that 24 percent figure presents an ominous shadow over the books of any company. Nearly every company cites turnover as a major headache and cost they wish they could reduce.

Zimmerman's research examined three key characteristics that can be measured in individuals: agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability. All of these characteristics are important in predicting future turnover.

People who are more agreeable are less likely to leave a job because they will go with the flow and care what others think, according to Zimmerman.

Conscientious people usually have a strong work ethic and are dependable and reliable. Zimmerman says those are characteristics of a committed employee.

Finally, individuals who are emotionally stable are less likely to quit a job because they are more calm and more secure.

"By focusing on hiring individuals who are higher on these traits, organizations can reduce the amount of turnover they have," Zimmerman says. "An organization can actually avoid turnover before an employee is even hired by looking at the personality traits ahead of time."

Zimmerman, who plans to publish his findings in *Personnel Psychology* magazine, is putting more pressure on hiring managers. Hiring already has been identified as one of the most crucial tasks of any manager, yet his research suggests it may be even more important.

The message of his findings is clear: Hire people who are likely to hang in there when the job gets tough and the rewards for your company will be great.

Zimmerman believes that using pre-employment hiring tests will help employers identify these traits in job-seekers.

Additionally, Zimmerman says some organizational factors can help predict turnover. Those factors include job satisfaction and job complexity.

But those are not easy things to identify or change since they vary from worker to worker.

Zimmerman is convinced that employers can do a better job of hiring and that if they use personality testing before they hire, they will be able to avoid workers who have a tendency to quit their jobs.

"In the past organizations were worried if people liked their jobs, but based on these results, personality is as, if not slightly more, important than how a job is designed," Zimmerman says. "By assessing personality you can better hire a person who is less likely to quit."

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