

## Psychologist Insight - Number 6

### How to retain your staff

Many of us will have heard the expression “The war for talent”. It was apparently first proposed by a management consultancy who came to recognise that with the global dissemination of business methodologies and technologies, the companies that would best cope with the demands of the future were those who won “The war for talent”. At the end of the day when everything else is equal, the quality of your work-force may well be the only thing that sets your organisation apart from the competition.

This is all (or should be) common sense to any HR practitioner. Yet having worked hard to win the war for talent, what do companies do to ensure that they retain the talent they have worked so hard to win?

Well maybe not enough say some researchers. BlessingWhite Incorporated of the US has for the last 3 years completed a large multinational survey of employees and found that “over a third of respondents appear to be at risk for leaving their organisations in 2006”. In 2005, 40% of employees “indicated that they might leave or were definitely planning their escape”. (See [www.blessingwhite.com](http://www.blessingwhite.com)).

Obviously moving forward in career terms was an important reason for many employees to change organisations, but BlessingWhite found that “my manager” was the third-most-common reason for leaving, something of little surprise to us at The Good Boss Company.

So what do our research findings suggest? We asked over 200 staff whether they had, or had thought about, leaving their current job. We then linked this to aspects of their boss’s behaviour using items taken from the Good Boss Questionnaire. Although the majority of boss behaviours did not have a statistically significant link to their staff leaving or thinking of leaving, a key minority of behaviours did.

For instance bosses who “keep changing their minds” or who “make unreasonable demands” increased the likelihood that their staff would leave. Other factors included a marked detachment from their staff, for instance “is only concerned to get their views across”, “lacks warmth” and “keeps their own motives hidden”. Other perceived boss behaviours, which contributed to staff leaving were “fails to acknowledge good work” and “Is only driven by self interest”. It seems, unsurprisingly, that staff positively look for engagement and recognition from their managers over and above any intrinsic satisfaction of just doing their job.

So what can bosses do to reduce the likelihood of their staff leaving? Well being better organised and more considerate helps, such as “makes effective use of time”, and “is reasonable in their requests”. The provision of regular positive feedback is also important such as “praises their staff” and “rewards good work”. Finally, the perception that managers are both “honest” and “genuine” reassures staff that they are working in an open environment, one that generates trust and hence long-term commitment.

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