

# It's Not Just the Job, it's the Job Culture

Three quick takeaways to help reduce turnover

BY MIKE JACQUART

**H**aving the specific skills for a particular job is important, but even the most qualified job applicant may not pan out if there is a poor “fit” between the position and the workplace. Whether you want to call it job or corporate culture, work environment, or fit, it's not just *what* you do for a living, but also *where* you work that can play a significant role in success.

And when someone suffers from a mental health challenge such as depression or an anxiety disorder, the right fit becomes even more important—and potentially costly for the employer

if overlooked. Take, for example, a reporter, writer, and editor named Stanley. He had lost a number of jobs during his 35-year career and was convinced that a poor fit between his personality and a fast-paced work environment—which *depression and anxiety issues exacerbated*—played a significant role in his terminations.

Stanley is far from alone. According to *Forbes*, untreated depression among employees cost employers \$44 billion annually in lost workdays. This article will explain three main takeaways for managers to help ensure better fits for both employees and for management.

### Never underestimate how many employees are in the wrong job.

Most employees seen at a corporate mental health program came in because they were unhappy at work. “Nine times out of ten, their unhappiness was due to a very poor fit between the employee’s personality and the work environment,” wrote Marina London in *Climbing out of Darkness: A Personal Journey into Mental Wellness*. London found herself repeatedly recommending that those employees look for a more suitable position.

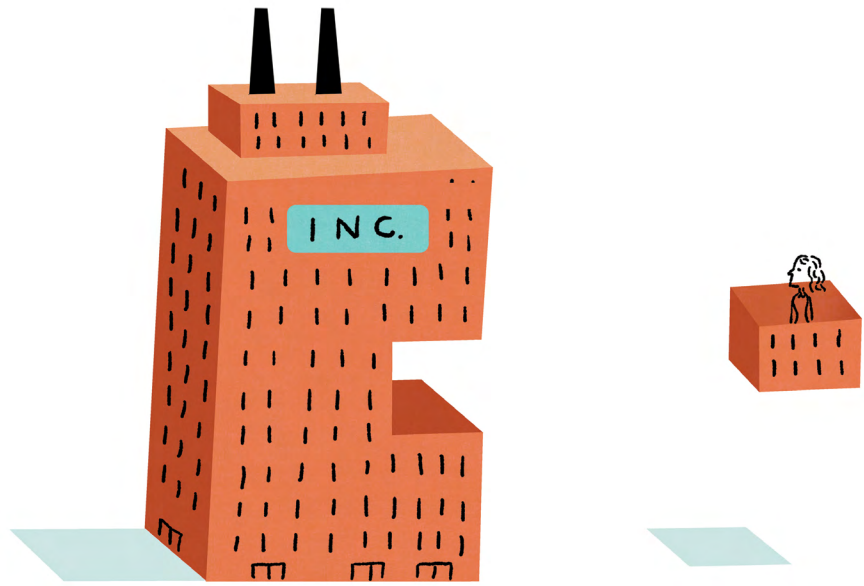
At a time when recruiting new hires is more competitive than ever, what company can afford excessive turnover, especially when it could have been avoided? While performance issues are obvious cause for concern, many signs of unhappy workers are more subtle. They include:

- Becoming more withdrawn socially.
- Lacking energy and motivation.
- Being more easily distracted or stressed.
- Showing more instances of anger than in the past.
- Displaying changes in outward appearance.

### Don’t overlook potential solutions.

Every workplace has interruptions, but they were endless at one of the companies where Stanley worked—an otherwise pleasant place to work, he reported. The problem was that it was too exuberant for him. Multitudes of coworkers would stop by his cubicle area each day. “Cubicles were in close proximity, and with concentration issues, the continual disturbances were very difficult to cope with,” he explained. As London wrote, “when you are depressed, everything is an effort. That includes socializing.”

There were some slower, less stressful, and quieter work environments at this firm, but when Stanley talked to human resources about working elsewhere, he was told the company didn’t provide “lateral transfers.” In other words, the new



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job had to be a promotion, not one that involved similar work. As a result of “staying put,” Stanley was terminated less than a year later, and the company lost an otherwise punctual, hardworking employee because of a refusal to bend their rules and move him elsewhere in the organization.

### Take the time to help ensure a good “match” from the start.

Determining whether the person can do the job is an important part of any job interview, but too often the discussion ends there. As Stanley’s experience shows, a reporter good at writing is not enough. If the individual is skilled at writing in-depth stories, for example, they will be a poor fit at a newspaper where spontaneity in covering fires and accidents is prioritized over lengthier essays. If the position requires working different work schedules, but the individual prefers steady, regular hours,

the job is not likely to work out. Probing questions that go beyond the nuts and bolts of a resume or application can be very revealing. Asking a candidate what types of jobs they have enjoyed the most and the least is a good start. Taking extra time to screen an applicant can make all the difference.

### Conclusion

There is no perfect job. That said, when it comes to selecting a work environment, the more you know who you are, the better choices you can make. But job fit is very much a two-way street. Employers need to learn the candidate’s wants and needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Staff attrition is inevitable, but better understanding of job culture will go a long way toward reducing turnover. ■

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