

WORKPLACE MATTERS

How to recharge burned-out midcareer workers

We've all heard about a midlife crisis, but did you know that there is such a thing as a "midcareer crisis?"



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Some of your most valuable and experienced employees may be experiencing, or be at risk for, this common experience. Midcareer workers are typically age 35 to 55.

Many midcareer workers struggle to balance work responsibilities with commitments to children and aging parents. Some face a lengthening retirement horizon due to the economy. Many did not grow up in a digital world and must keep up with rapid technological change. And finally, some are just plain bored. Here are some signs of midcareer burnout:

- ◆ Withdrawal behaviors, such as arriving late, leaving early, taking long breaks or failing to participate in meetings and activities.

- ◆ Increased conflicts, involving cynicism, outbursts of frustration, turning small differences into arguments, being overwhelmed by work.

- ◆ A performance decline, such as a lack of passion and motivation, and reduced efficiency and productivity.

Businesses cannot afford to lose the engagement of their workers, particularly these midcareer workers who are typically high-performers. How to re-energize them? Luckily, it doesn't require big, new programs or a lot of expense. It requires management attention and savvy. For instance:

Flexible schedules and work arrangements: Achieving a work-life balance is difficult for this sandwiched generation. By supporting the use of laptop computers and smart phones, employers can help workers accommodate all of their commitments. They can stay connected while they take care of outside responsibilities during office hours.

Fresh and challenging assignments or projects: Mix equal parts old and new so your midcareer employee can leverage existing skills and experiences in a new area. Provide variety. Offer a chance to learn.

Involvement in peer networks: Encourage participation in a supportive network of colleagues. There are many local professional peer networks, including the Lane County Human Resource Association, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, the Emerald Valley High Performance Enterprise Consortium, the GreenLane Sustainable Business Network and local Chambers of Commerce.

Mentor programs: Set up these employees as mentors and teachers. This will serve the dual purpose of making the employee feel valued and building your staff's skills through cross training. Mentor relationships are typically perceived as one-way relationships. In fact, they are ideally an exchange of skills and knowledge. The younger employee may be able to share information about new technology, say, while benefiting from the midcareer employee's experience.

Different perspective: Rotate the employee to a different part of the organization. This can allow employees who have become bored to test and expand their skills and work with a different team.

Training: Ask your the employee about professional development interests. Support such training and then find work to make use of it.

The bottom line is to engage mid-career workers in order to retain them and get the most benefit from their knowledge and experience.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or (541) 682-7224.