

7 Warning Signs of an Unhappy Employee

By Meredith Falb

Watch for these common, but not always obvious, red flags of dissatisfied and disengaged workers.

Companies with engaged employees outperform companies with disengaged workers—some sources say they win by 22 percent, some say it's more like 200. So businesses are investing more time, effort, research and money into building great cultures that will keep employees happier than ever.

But how can you tell if an employee is unhappy if they don't come out and tell you? Although it's not always obvious when someone's dissatisfied at work, disengaged workers do exhibit common behaviors—you just have to know what to look for.

Here are seven signs to watch out for:

- 1. They do the bare minimum.** His work might not exactly be inadequate, but he is clearly doing just enough so that you can't reprimand him. This is typical of a disengaged employee who is not inspired or passionate about his job and does it solely for the paycheck.
- 2. They are nowhere to be found.** She might constantly come in late, watch the clock and bolt as soon as it's quitting time, or simply take as much personal time as possible without blatantly flouting the rules. She might be interviewing elsewhere or simply be avoiding being at work.
- 3. They don't have any friends at work.** One of the best ways to ensure that employees are engaged is to build a great culture where friendships can be formed. Many people who are less than thrilled with their companies or job responsibilities stay for the people. If the employee has failed to connect with anyone at the company on a personal level, it is unlikely that he will feel great about being at work.
- 4. They don't refer others.** You know that the employee in question is well-connected in your industry. However, she shrugs her shoulders when you ask if she can recommend anyone for an open position, despite a possible referral bonus. This may be a red flag: Unhappy employees will not want to subject their friends and former colleagues to an environment that they know is not positive.
- 5. They feel slighted.** Did you recently promote someone else in your department over the employee in question? Did you hire an outsider to be his boss despite the fact that he's worked for you for several years? Even if he isn't qualified to be the boss, this type of situation can be de-motivating and cause the employee to become angry.
- 6. They are secretive.** Unhappy employees often talk smack about the company, other co-workers and/or their manager to vent their frustrations. Does the employee spend a lot of time whispering to colleagues or close her chat window immediately as you approach his desk? It's possible that she's talking about how much she wishes she could work somewhere else.
- 7. They don't cooperate.** Unhappy employees often try to rebel in small ways to battle the frustration and powerlessness they feel in hating a job they depend on to pay their bills. They will often ignore mandates

such as signing up for required training or coming to a company wide meeting. If they don't feel connected to co-workers (see No. 3), they might even give peers a hard time for asking them to do tasks.

If you notice any of these signs in one of your employees, it's a good idea to look a little deeper and see if there is anything you can do to reverse the damage, especially if the employee is (or used to be) a valuable asset. If you recognize these traits in yourself, it's time to do some self-evaluation. However, sometimes the best thing you can do with an unhappy employee is to let him go. Disengaged workers can bring down the people around them, negatively affecting morale, productivity and overall company culture.