

# Avoid Counteroffers Empty Gunnysacks

Many people are under the false perception that a counteroffer solves a hiring difficulty. In fact, it is a no-win gambit for both parties. History shows that a person who accepts a counteroffer usually leaves the company within six months to a year later. Unfortunately, money is rarely the issue. Therefore, the underlying causes for an employee's dissatisfaction are still present when a person commits to remain with his/her present company.

## **Company Policy on Counteroffers**

Before we get into the main discussion, let's offer a company policy on counteroffers. Never give a counteroffer to an employee unless that person is absolutely needed for the next six months. Since a counteroffer is a temporary solution, then lavishly compensate the employee. Make the offer so ridiculously high the person will not have second thoughts about leaving. Nevertheless, immediately begin looking for a replacement. Ironically, compensation packages beyond the norm is one strategy companies use to keep employees from resigning. It might be work in keeping turnover down but how effective are unhappy employees? As a primary incentive, a paycheck is not a motivator for higher performance. In the above example, even if the employee accepts the counteroffer, try a gunnysack cleansing. It might work to keep the employee longer than expected.

## **Why Counteroffers Fail**

To understand why a counteroffer fails, one must understand the "gunnysack" theory. Everyone has an invisible gunnysack that we carry with us during our career. It is never empty. Even when we first start with a company it might contain a few items. The higher dental deductible or being paid once a month is not to our liking. As time goes on, the gunnysack grows and shrinks depending on how we perceive the working environment. Unfortunately, we are not always aware of what we put into the gunnysack. For example, the boss's annoying habit or our office decor might be the little nuisances that sneak into the gunnysack and weigh it down.

If the gunnysack becomes too much of a burden, our job becomes a struggle. That's when we start looking for a new opportunity. Since our sack is bulging with many small items, real job dissatisfaction is tough to define. We may be deluded into thinking that it might be only one problem. However, our frustrations are a result of everything in the gunnysack. What a counteroffer does is temporarily empty the

gunnysack. The euphoria is brief. Unfortunately, as we encounter those same nuisances, the gunnysack quickly fills again. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that six months later it is bulging again. The job search is revived because money did not solve the problems.

### **Counteroffers are Career Killers**

Incidentally accepting a counteroffer can be a career killer. A new start at a different company does have risk but also offers opportunity. Remaining at a company always leaves that doubt but also the person may be worse off than before. A counteroffer adds compensation that might make a person unmarketable. At a higher salary, many companies now cannot afford to hire this person. Therefore, job dissatisfaction is even more frustrating since new opportunities might not be possible until the person's experience level matches prevailing wages.

### **Gunnysack Cleansing**

To avoid a counteroffer situation, the obvious answer is to minimize the load in the gunnysack. Since everyone has one, there is a good chance that our boss's gunnysack has "us" in his/hers. So the idea is to have a regular gunnysack cleansing. Every three months, trade gunnysack items. We commit to something that will make our boss's job easier. In trade, he/she will do something that lightens our load. Surprisingly, sometimes dumping one item causes some other annoyance to fall out. Besides, many times by just verbalizing the contents causes some stresses to disappear.

Obviously, we cannot solve all of our boss's worries. Hence, we cannot expect our boss to relieve completely our problems. The cleansing is an informal method to lighten the load by mutually agreeing to help each other in specific areas. A handwritten note to review the commitments is needed to make this technique work.

### **Gunnysack Cleansing Boosts Ego**

Another benefit of a gunnysack cleansing, if done right, provides the opportunity to restore "ego" points. Although a counteroffer is usually intended to bribe an employee to stay, it does have an ego boost associated with it. An employee is made to feel wanted. Before a resignation, the tendency is to take an employee for granted. Afterward, every effort is made to counteract the possible talent loss. Praise comes freely when before it was probably nonexistent. However, once an employee commits to stay, then the relationship returns to normal—the employee's worth fades into the background. A regular scheduled gunnysack cleansing allows the opportunity to

reaffirm the employee's value. That feeling of being wanted can alleviate many job frustrations.

### **Open Communication Lowers Turnover**

A good gunnysack cleaning makes for healthier companies. Open communication is the key to maintaining a good working atmosphere. This will result in reducing about 95% of turnover problems. Therefore, counteroffers as temporary solutions are not needed.