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### Can you keep your most talented people when prospects are better?

As the economy improves and jobs start opening up, employees will be asking themselves three questions about working for you and your company:

- Do I have something to contribute?
- Is what I have to contribute valued?
- Am I in or am I out?

A recent Conference Board Survey (released January 5, 2010) found that:

- Only 45% of employees are satisfied or extremely satisfied with their job
- 65% of employed survey respondents said they are looking for a new opportunity
- 60% plan to intensify their job search over the next three months
- Those who plan to stay in their jobs will often do so because of reasons other than the work itself: a best friend at work, a good paycheck, or an easy commute

In the coming months and years, the organizations that will win the recruiting and retention game will be those that actively build a culture of engagement and support employee growth and skill development.

You can take active steps now to ensure that your best people remain loyal when the economic situation improves. ☐

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## Post-Recession Workplace Stress

By Mary Texer and Cathy Perme

Did your grandmother have a saying for every situation? When considering the mindset of most employees in the U.S. right now, we bet our grandmothers would say, "Once bitten, twice shy."

Consciously or unconsciously, people who have been laid off or witnessed layoffs may stay hyper-aware of the possibility of losing their job, even when things get better. Their reactions to perceived threats (such as rumors) or familiar but perhaps uncomfortable situations (such as coaching feedback) may be amplified, because they are dealing not only with the current work situation, but also with ghosts from jobs past. On some level, it is not unlike post traumatic stress disorder caused by such things as active service duty experiences, violent attacks, car accidents, etc.

People who exhibit these out-sized behaviors are not bad employees. They have just been under extreme stress for an extended period of time. They may be always second guessing themselves and their capabilities, as well as your motives and actions as a boss. To move beyond past experiences, you need to provide effective feedback and a way to help them process both thoughts and actions.

So what can be done to turn the current environment into one of high engagement and productivity once again?

- 1. Start with a realistic understanding of the new employment "contract"**
  - a. Rather than looking at working for a company as a long-term commitment, both parties need to look at jobs as *assignments*
  - b. Employees need to recognize that companies *keep* people for as long as their skills are needed and they are a good match for the company culture
  - c. Companies need to recognize that employees *stay* at companies for as long as the company culture is a good match for them and they can deliver value with their skills
- 2. Accept the roles and responsibilities implied in this new contract**
  - a. The employee is responsible for *adding value* to the organization, *keeping skills up to date* and continuing to grow professionally
  - b. The organization is responsible for *engaging* and supporting employees in their work and *actively supporting* their growth and development
- 3. In coaching sessions, have a candid discussion about:**
  - a. The strengths and contributions of your employee – what they bring to the table that is an asset to the job and your organization
  - b. What you want, need or expect from this person
  - c. What the employee wants, needs or expects from you or your company

Rebuilding trust, albeit with more realistic expectations, will be key to re-engaging employees and boosting productivity after this recession once again. ☐

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