

Low job satisfaction is the real talent drain

Nearly half of young South African professionals are unhappy in their jobs and are looking to change jobs within the next 12 months - but the focus on the true cost of the talent drain is understated by most players in the market who are not doing enough to align their expectations with potential and existing employees.



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Winani Ndlovu, research manager at employer branding specialist Universum, says 47% of the 22,000 young professionals surveyed by Universum in their annual research said they were ready to move from their current employers, with an average job satisfaction level of 6 out of 10.

“We have a retention problem in South Africa. We hear a lot about ‘the war for talent’, but our research suggests that retention is fast becoming a bigger problem,” said Ndlovu. “If you look at the true costs to a company of losing key talent, companies should be doing far more work to align their employer brand with both potential hires’ and existing employees’ preferences.”

Apart from the costs around recruitment, on-boarding and training, the broader effects include lost productivity during the time it takes to find a suitable candidate, low morale of other employees, and the negative impact of a high turnover rate.

Key reasons for dissatisfaction

Surprisingly, job security and salary are not the main reasons why people are unhappy in their jobs, says Ndlovu. The key reasons young professionals want to move are mismatched expectations in areas like career development, the ability to do meaningful and creative work, how innovative an employer is, growth prospects and ethics. Strong leadership is also cited as a must, with company leaders needing to be inspirational, and demonstrate a clear vision and purpose.

“What companies should be doing better is to articulate up-front what the employee relationship is going to look like. So, when talent joins, they come in for the right reasons: they know what the business stands for, they know what their role looks like, and they have the right expectations from the word go,” said Ndlovu.

Aligning expectations is a two-way street – and the relationship starts before people even apply for a job. This is where the importance of building an employer brand comes in, as it allows the company to show prospective employees who they are, what they stand for, and how they nurture and develop their people.

Ndlovu’s advice to job-hunters is to start their search with a clear idea of what they want from their career. “Ask yourself: what would I expect from a perfect employer? What am I prepared to compromise on? What do I want my employer to stand for, and how do I identify with that? If you’re passionate about what your prospective employer does and is, you have a far better chance of a successful career with them.”

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