



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

19 April 2002

### **Surviving Team Turnover**

Senior employees have seen their share of turnover and understand that it is all a part of being in the business world. Turnover is inevitable. Does that mean we like it? With some rare exceptions (and you know who these people are), normally we do not. Turnover is disruptive. It means that the remaining team members need to compensate for the person who left. It means you have to take the time to hire a new member of the team and get them through a learning curve before they are productive. In general, turnover is bad – unless we are the ones leaving. In that case, it is always a great opportunity.

This paper is not about how to retain people. That can be a book by itself. So, let us assume that we work for a decent company, we make decent compensation, we have a decent manager and our company stock price has not dropped at least 80% over the past year. (Again – these are assumptions!) In spite of all that, one of your team members leaves. Maybe they have been promoted internally. Maybe their spouse was transferred. But, someone has left. How do you and your team react? One way is to complain about the lemons that life has dealt you. But, turnover can have positive aspects as well – make lemonade instead!

#### **Take Care of the Basics**

First take care of the basics. Congratulate the person on their new opportunity. Make all the appropriate jokes about asking if the new company needs anyone else, and that they will now be blamed for all problems for the next three months.

Next, get down to business. As soon as possible (the same day would be great), call a meeting of the team member and others the person worked closely with. Document all of the responsibilities of the person leaving. Determine what work he or she has been assigned. Be sure to remember any ongoing roles and responsibilities. For instance, was he or she providing primary support for one or more business functions? Did he or she validate that the financial systems are in balance? Sometimes it is hard for the person to articulate everything they do. Ask the other team members to bring up anything that was missed.

Determine what work will be completed before the person leaves and what needs to be reassigned. This reassignment may be for the short-term until a replacement is found or for the long-term.

Everyone who is assigned one or more of the responsibilities needs to work closely with the departing teammate to cross-train, and learn as much as possible about what needs to be done. Hopefully, you have at least a two-week notice to make these transitions. However, the bottom line is that when the person's last day arrives, all of their work must either be completed or transitioned to another team member.

#### **Make Lemonade**



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

One of the positive aspects about turnover is that it provides opportunities for remaining team members to increase or change responsibilities. For instance, if the person who left was doing web development, you may not need to immediately hire another web developer. Maybe this is an opportunity to have another team member assume the web responsibilities. In many cases, a resignation can provide an opportunity for remaining team members to change responsibilities and pick up new skills. This can cause some short-term pain and productivity decreases, but your team will come out ahead in the long-term. This strategy will also position your team with skilled backups that can be counted on for expertise if other team members leave.

### Summary

You have seen turnover before, and you will see it again. Don't panic – just work through it. In the short-term, make sure all the current responsibilities of the person leaving are understood and transitioned to remaining team members. Then, try to make lemonade – look for the positive benefit that change can bring. Work with your manager to evaluate the skills and desires of the remaining team members, including yourself, to see how the work can be reallocated so that others can gain new responsibilities and experience.