

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Is loyalty dead?

I hate quick cuts in music videos, as well as the daily barrage of information that forces us to react, rather than reflect. It makes us want everything now, every answer immediately, every issue resolved on the spot.

It wasn't too long ago that a movie camera lingered on a shot, we had time for hand-written letters and we understood that things take time to evolve. You can almost forget that attitude in today's business environment.

In my first job at a privately owned publishing firm, it was not unusual for an employee to celebrate 30, even 50 years there. Imagine that. Several people spent their entire careers at this firm — from youth to retirement. Loyalty like that is almost inconceivable now.

We live in a race car society and the folks you want to employ are already too comfortable with change. The last 20 years have brought a dramatic reshaping of the business landscape from the one that our parents and grandparents knew.

Free agent market

A recent *Wall Street Journal* interview with David Birch, a futurist and business growth expert, presented the idea that loyalty is not only dead, it's so dead that managers and owners like you shouldn't expect employees to stay very long. This will force managers to break work up into easily managed, easily trained steps, says Birch, much like Henry Ford's production line. Each assignment, he says, will be simplified to the point that an employee can come in and learn it with a minimum of time and effort.

Birch calls today's new job seekers "free agents" who prefer income gains to retirement perks, who hop from job to job and who see themselves as entirely responsible for their livelihood (quite the opposite from those lifers who let the organization guide their careers).

But what about loyalty? Family-run firms? Teamwork? How can you encourage a feeling of "family" and build a well-run team with workers who are itchy to move on? That's the million-dollar question.

We sure don't know all the answers but we've started the discussion in this month's coverage of "The Labor Crunch: Keep Employees Happy" (pages 36 through 66). There are many theories that probably work, but I'm betting on the one that says it's the organization itself that keeps people loyal. Sure, good wages and perks do wonders, as do interesting work, challenge, rewards and recognition. But the element that binds these together is a strong, people-centered organization.

Do you have a system that works? Are there steps you've taken that you'd like to share with your peers? If you'd like to talk about it, please call me at 800/225-4569 or send me an email at: sgibson@advanstar.com.

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