



The Top 10 Reasons Why Rejecting ‘Job Jumpers’ is Dumb, and a Missed Opportunity

by Dr. John Sullivan

Hiring managers and recruiters have a long history of rejecting “job jumpers.” And even today, 43 percent of employers won’t consider job jumpers, according to CareerBuilder. If you are not familiar with the term, a “job jumper” or “job hopper” is a recruiting prospect who has had short tenures with several employers.

Unfortunately, it’s an antiquated concept that might have been valid long ago, but in today’s volatile talent marketplace, automatically rejecting frequent job changers may cause you to miss out on many exceptional hires. Rather than the often-mistaken assumption that job jumpers are disloyal, selfish, impatient, and expensive, they may actually be superstars who merely change jobs frequently because they are so good, and they are continually offered many new and higher-level opportunities (that their current firm simply can’t or won’t match). There is no available public data that demonstrates that hiring job jumpers has a low ROI, and in fact, the opposite may be true.



6. If you want next-generation talent, you may have to hire job jumpers.

91 percent of millennials expect to stay in a job for less than three years (FutureWorkplace.com), which could mean that millennials could have as many as 20 jobs in their career. In fact, 25 percent of workers under 35 have already had more than five jobs in their short career (CareerBuilder). Most employees' view of loyalty is rapidly changing, and many members of new generations may not be loyal no matter what you do. So if you're avoiding job jumpers because you want loyal employees, you may be disappointed to learn that our society simply "doesn't create many loyal workers anymore."

7. Would you rather have LeBron for one year or Homer Simpson for 4.6?

Nearly 50 percent of former job jumpers stay at their next firm more than two years, and the average hire stays only 4.6 years. And most that "run the numbers" have found that short-term excellence is significantly better than long-term mediocrity! When you hire a superstar who may well leave within 18-24 months, you still have a great opportunity to use their skills and learn from them. Superstars frequently move on, but the tremendous short-term gain and "push forward" that they provide makes hiring them worthwhile. Having an average employee for as little as two more years

simply won't likely produce the same business results.

8. The sunk training costs of a job jumper may be a myth.

Many managers mistakenly assume that you will lose your training investment if a newly hired job jumper "quits early." But the job jumpers may not need much investment. The fact is that, since job jumpers have obviously had multiple jobs, most are not rookies who need lots of training. Having had multiple jobs may have also made them into individuals who don't require a lot of management attention and they may by now have even become leaders. And with their extensive experience in many different jobs and companies, most job jumpers can get up to speed more rapidly. Taken together, most jumpers simply don't require the same investment, management time, and training as most new hires. They may also be cheaper employees because during their short tenure, they won't likely use retirement or educational benefits. And if they do encounter performance difficulties, because they knew how to get a new job, they will likely quit on their own without any need for performance management on your part.

9. You want employees who successfully forecasted a troubled future.

Some job jumpers leave as their firm is sinking. If you worked at RadioShack

for example and you left because you successfully forecasted the impending downfall of your company, you would actually be more desirable as a candidate. Smart people are loyal to a point, but if the "job jumper" left a struggling or failing firm before it crashed, you should give them credit, not blame. Being loyal and staying on the Titanic until the very end is a trait you might not want in an employee.

10. You may not want to keep every innovator over the long term.

You hire innovators based on the premise that you want to capture their innovative ideas. But unfortunately, there are few "serial innovators" in the world that produce multiple innovations. So if you hire a job jumper who is likely to be a "one-time-only innovator," the fact that they may leave after providing that one innovation is not a major problem. In some cases, they are "a one-trick pony" and they would be expensive to keep because they may do little more than rest on their laurels.

Take Actions to End Their Cycle of Job Jumping and to Minimize Any Damage

Rather than assuming that their early departure pattern will continue, develop a plan of action to keep jumpers at your firm as long as you want them.

- **Proactively act so that a job jumper will stay** – jumpers left in the past because they were not treated as they expected to be treated. However, just because others have lost them doesn't mean that you must also lose them. You can break that cycle by making sure that they have a great manager (a primary cause of turnover) and by also identifying and applying their individual motivators. You must also identify their "frustrators" (why they quit their previous jobs) and work to avoid letting them happen again. Simply increase the volume of two-way feedback with them and focus your retention process on

them. And finally, if you ask them for their “dream job criteria” and you can meet them, you will find that they may never leave again. Job jumping is not inevitable; the pattern can be stopped with proactive and targeted motivation, communications, and retention actions.

- ***A job jumper may be at the end of their wanderlust*** – don’t assume that an individual’s job jumping will go on forever. After a series of jumps, the odds are that former jumpers now know what they want and don’t want in a job, manager and company.” Your job is to work with them as an employee so that they feel that they have finally found their home.
- ***Learn to take immediate advantage of all short-duration talent*** – the very best firms have learned how to effectively manage a variety of short-duration talent. We have learned how to get the most out of temps, contractors, consultants, and seasonal help. So we should do the same with job jumpers who may become short-duration talent. Start by assuming that they might leave early, so proactively capture their ideas and best practices. Also assign them a buddy or mentee who can absorb their wisdom and experience. Obviously it may not make sense to put them into longer-term assignments like leadership development or extensive training unless you have taken proactive retention actions to ensure that they will be around to complete it.

The Many Reasons Why Employees Now Move So Often

Rather than being close minded, understand why more and more recruiting targets on the surface look like job jumpers. The reasons why more people switch jobs today include:

- ***The bad economy increased the number of job jumpers*** – during

down economic times, high layoff rates, and the fact that many individuals were forced to take temporary or part-time jobs, resulted in many individuals switching jobs more frequently. In tough economic times, the desire for job security means that these job jumpers would have preferred not to have changed jobs so frequently. Unfortunately, economic conditions made many individuals into “involuntary job jumpers.” For example, one high-tech manager who I know loved his job and company, but the minute that they froze his operating budget for a year, he left immediately. He simply wasn’t willing to take a year off from innovation, experimenting, rapid learning, and being on the leading edge of his field. In his case, blame the budget cut not any wanderlust on his part.

- ***The best move more often because recruiters find them*** – with the growth of LinkedIn, referral programs, and social media, you don’t have to be actively looking for a job in order to be approached by a top recruiter or headhunter. This means that many job jumpers don’t choose to look for a new job, but instead they are found and approached by recruiters because they have extensive contacts, advanced skills, or that their work is visible online. Being found and courted by recruiters is even more likely if they worked for a top name. So you might assume that jumpers are less loyal, but do you really want someone who wouldn’t jump at a better opportunity that was presented to them? The best simply want to grow, and you can’t blame them if they are constantly approached by recruiters touting “better opportunities to grow.” By the way, consider the fact that if they would’ve turned down an exciting growth opportunity and stayed, they probably would’ve ended up being frustrated and not very productive (a lose-lose situation for both parties).
- ***Everyone moves more often now***



because applying for a job is so easy – the tenure of the average employee at a firm is 4.6 years, so almost everyone these days is a job jumper. One of the reasons that employees quit more often these days is that it’s so easy to find and apply for a new job. Jobs are “pushed” to them and with the click of a button they can apply for a job using their current LinkedIn profile. Employee tenure is going down in part because it’s simply so easy to leave.

- ***Bad retention efforts may have been the real cause for job jumping*** – managers became lazy or even arrogant because their employees had few choices but to tolerate them. So after years of suffering, it’s not surprising that as economic conditions improved, the best employees quickly moved on. So I wouldn’t automatically blame the ambitious job jumper for moving on, because the blame has to be shared with poor retention efforts. You want ambitious employees with initiative, so you can’t blame them for moving when an outside firm clearly valued them more than their current manager



who was unwilling to match a clearly superior opportunity.

- ***Don't blame techies for following the latest technology*** – many of the best technology employees are simply in love with new technologies. So if their current firm clearly isn't investing in cutting-edge technology, you shouldn't blame these techies for leaving to a firm that has leading-edge technologies. So before rejecting a techie for job jumping, see if they left for technology driven reasons. Being loyal and willing to work on antiquated technology may not be a 100 percent positive trait, even for your current employees.
- ***Boomerangs are job jumpers too*** – incidentally, when considering hiring job jumpers, take a second look at the employees who have “jumped” from your own firm. Recruiting back top performers who have left (they are called boomerangs) can be an effective recruiting strategy. Leading firms (Deloitte and DaVita are two

that excel in this area) have learned to welcome them back with open arms because, like most job jumpers, they now have additional external experience and skills. In addition, many managers view the return of top performers as a kind of reinforcement that they (the firm and the culture) are excellent, because people with “multiple choices” chose to come back!

Final Thoughts

In the Silicon Valley where I work, moving between firms (jumping) is seen by managers as a positive thing, because it gives an individual a chance to learn in a variety of environments. Having a wide variety of experiences (we call it diversity) is viewed as lessening the chances that an employee will take a “too narrow view” of their job and where the industry is going.

Unfortunately, I find that HR professionals in the rest of the world are among the

strongest resisters when it comes to hiring job jumpers. But there is no data to suggest that the best stay longest and that those who jump are bad hires. In fact the opposite may be true: the best move often because they get multiple offers and they can. In most cases that I have researched, job jumpers actually wanted to stay but they couldn't, because their managers or HR lacked the courage to match the learning and growth opportunities that were readily available at firms ... across the street.

So the final lesson to be learned is that your best employees will likely soon become a job jumper unless you move proactively to make sure that their next best “opportunity” offer comes from inside your firm! And if you can't keep every top employee forever, don't worry, your job is to simply get the most out of them during the time they spend with your firm.

Dr John Sullivan is an internationally known HR thought-leader from the Silicon Valley who specializes in providing bold and high business impact; strategic Talent Management solutions to large corporations. He's a prolific author with over 900 articles and 10 books covering all areas of Talent Management. His ideas have appeared in every major business source including the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, BusinessWeek, Fast Company, CFO, Inc., NY Times, SmartMoney, USA Today, HBR and the Financial Times. He has been interviewed on CNN and the CBS and ABC nightly news, NPR, as well many local TV and radio outlets. Fast Company called him the “Michael Jordan of Hiring”, Staffing.org called him “the father of HR metrics” and SHRM called him “One of the industries most respected strategists”. He was selected among HR's “Top 10 Leading Thinkers” and he was ranked #8 among the top 25 online influencers in Talent Management. He served as the Chief Talent Officer of Agilent Technologies, the HP spinoff with 43,000 employees and he was the CEO of the Business Development Center, a minority business consulting firm in Bakersfield, California. He is currently a Professor of Management at San Francisco State.

