

The \$64-Billion Question: Why Are Talented People Leaving Corporate America?

By Jennifer Millman. Date Posted: January 11, 2008

Did you know that unfairness in the workplace costs employers \$64 billion a year? That's the total cost of replacing and losing professionals who leave because of this reason alone; the cost in damaged brand reputation is far more.

In today's corporate environment, subtle factors--public humiliation, snide remarks, being passed over for promotions, cultural incompetence, jokes, teasing, [hair-touching and pregnant-belly-rubbing](#)--are more prevalent than overt discrimination, but the repercussions are no less dramatic for the companies that practice them.

Would you recommend your employer to a prospective client or job applicant if you felt slighted or under-appreciated? What about because you're one of few Black accountants, for example, in your firm, and you constantly get mistaken for another one of your Black colleagues with whom you share no more in common than the color of your skin?

Not only do talented people of color and gay and lesbian professionals who experience such treatment leave their companies, they tell everyone they know why they left.

What would make them more likely to stay? The Level Playing Field Institute surveyed 1,700 professionals and managers to find out. Here are some of the top-line findings from [The Corporate Leavers Survey](#):

Why do people leave?

- People of color are **three times** more likely than white men to cite unfairness as the only reason for leaving their employer, and gay and lesbian professionals are nearly twice as likely as white men to cite this as the only reason for leaving
- Being compared to a terrorist is the most common form of unfairness cited by respondents (**19 percent**), followed by being asked to attend more recruiting or community-related events (**15.6 percent**), being passed over for a promotion (**14.9 percent**) and being publicly humiliated (**14.8 percent**)

How much does it cost?

- **Twenty-seven percent** of those who experienced unfairness in the last year say it strongly discouraged them from recommending their company to potential employees, and **13 percent** said this about products and services

What can employers do about it? Learn from [The 2007 DiversityInc Top 50 Companies for Diversity®](#), which constantly survey employees and break down results by race/ethnicity, gender and other factors to assess their workplace environment. Read [5 Ways Employee Surveys Work for Everyone](#) to find out how to do this right.

What would make people more likely to stay?

- **Better benefits.** Nearly **45 percent** of gay and lesbian professionals would have likely stayed if their employer had offered more or better benefits, compared with about **26 percent** of people of color and **20 percent** of whites. Find out why [domestic-partner benefits](#) are a litmus test for Top 50 companies, and how many scored 100 percent on the Human Rights Campaign's [Corporate Equality Index](#)
- **Better managers.** **Thirty-four percent** of people of color would have likely stayed if their managers better recognized and rewarded their abilities, compared with about **32 percent** of gay and lesbian professionals and **17 percent** of whites. What do [talented people of color want most](#) on the job?
- **More positive energy.** Working in a positive environment is incredibly important to people of color and gay and lesbian professionals. They make decisions about where to work based on this information, and if their company doesn't satisfy their expectations, they leave. **Twenty-nine percent** and **32 percent** of people of color and gay and lesbian professionals, respectively, said they would have been more likely to stay in a positive work environment, compared with **18.5 percent** of white women and **12.5 percent** of white men
- **More respect.** Everyone wants respect on the job, but for people of color and gay and lesbian professionals, this is even more crucial. About **27 percent** and **25 percent** of gay and lesbian professionals and people of color, respectively, would have been more likely to stay in a respectful work environment.