

In Defense of Long-Term Employment with a Single Employer

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

If you go into any business that's been around more than twenty or thirty years, you will inevitably find a handful of people who've been there from the very beginning of their careers. These well-adjusted souls will typically report to work each day at a similar time and have managed to be the only ones left in the organization after generation upon generation of people coming and going.

Many people do last for decades in the same organization and there are characteristics which uniformly seem to characterize these sorts of people. While I am a recruiter, I do have a great deal of respect for people who in this day and age are able to "stay put" at the same organization for a long period of time and remain at single organizations throughout their careers. None of this is to say there aren't really good and solid reasons for leaving an employer if the going gets impossible. I am the first to admit that there are employment environments that can be intolerable for many. Nevertheless, you need to keep in mind that if an employer has been around for 30+ years, there is a chance the employer is doing something right. Before leaving, it is often wise to take inventory of yourself.

There are certain characteristics that people who stick with the same employer for long lengths of time tend to exhibit and also certain characteristics of this sort of employment situation. These characteristics are as follows:

1. People Who Remain With the Same Firm for Long Lengths of Time Are Generally Very Committed to Their Jobs

Many people were raised with the idea (or have the idea) that fidelity to an employer is something that is expected. The unwritten rule is that if you aren't treated horribly, then there's no reason you should leave a job.

One of the saddest (but also the most refreshing) things I've seen as a [legal recruiter](#) is when I interview and meet with attorneys who have been with the same firm for 20 years or more, whose firms are going under, and who are forced to look for other opportunities. When attorneys like this look for a new position, their rationale is most often that something profound has happened at the firm that makes their separation necessary. These attorneys appear as if they're going through a divorce or have just had a death of someone they're very close to. For them, leaving a position is a traumatic experience.

This sort of fidelity between employers and employees reminds me often of people who've been married 50 years or more. There is a mutual respect that comes out of this and a thinking that both need one another. I believe that this sort of thinking is really missing in this day and age. While this may not seem related to careers, a statistic I once saw in a social science class showed that as divorce rates went up in society, so did rates of drug abuse, suicide, and other associated societal ills. The bond between an employer and an employee is a powerful force that, in its best form, is much like the bond between a husband and wife in a very committed relationship. Both sides respect and accept one another with certain conditions, but for the most part unconditionally.

2. People Who Remain With the Same Organization Are Not Interested in Office Gossip or Negativity

In every organization, there are people who don't succeed at their jobs. These people are generally looking for ways to cut corners with their work and don't produce satisfactory results for their employer. Most organizations will call out this behavior and then speak with the employee. Some employees correct their behavior and others simply get mad at the organization. Some employees may be mad at their organizations for no particular reason at all—or may be angry with a previous organization and simply transfer their anger to their most recent organization. I remember a recruiter once telling me never to hire someone who had been fired from their last job. People who have been fired from their last job will typically take out their anger on their next organization, he told me.

There will always be people who have a lot of anger towards their employers. These angry employees will start rumors, attempt to share their anger with others in the organization, and often subtly (or not so subtly) forecast "gloom and doom" for their employer. This is how rumor mills get started and these sorts of rumor mills are prevalent in every decent sized organization.

People who remain with their employers generally don't participate in these rumor mills or even pay attention to them. Every business goes through boom and bust periods, or face various crises. Loyal employees barely notice the difference because they're too busy getting their job done day in and day out.

3. People Who Remain With the Same Organization for Long Periods of Time Aren't Interested in Being Grandstanders—They Are There to Do Their Jobs and Do Them Well

I once heard someone say that the most successful people are often the most screwed up. I am not sure if this is true, but there is some wisdom in every saying like this. People who are able to remain with the same employer for long periods of time aren't concerned with "getting ahead" to the same extent as many others are. Many people who are extremely concerned with getting ahead leave, saying they are looking for better opportunities because they are interested in immediate advancement. In other cases, people will try and show up others in their workplace.

People who remain at their organization for long periods of time are most interested in just doing their jobs. They have faith in their organizations and that things will work out for them. They aren't loud and don't go out of their way to attract attention to themselves. Their main concern is to simply do the best job possible.

What ends up happening to people who remain focused on their work and not grandstanding is they get ahead while others put their foot in their mouth. I remember when I first started practicing, there was an attorney who was first in his class from a major [law school](#) and the Editor-in-Chief of his school's law review. Everyone thought this particular attorney was really on his toes and someone likely to have major success at the firm. This attorney wrote articles in his spare time, and argued with firm partners about the finer points of law (and was right when he argued). While this attorney was very smart, he thought he

was so good that he ended up sabotaging his career when he called a newspaper to discuss a case he was working on. He ended up being quoted on the front page of the *Los Angeles Daily Journal*. The fallout from this incredible incident was huge. The attorney left the [law firm](#) a month or two later and never worked for a large law firm again.

These sort of incidents aside, it's important to keep a moderately low profile in order to have long-term success in any job. It's never wise to raise your swords and capture the limelight. While someone can win a sword match for some time, they will eventually lose—and in a sword match, the loss is usually permanent.

4. People Who Remain With Their Employer for Long Periods of Time Typically Do Good (But Not Necessarily "Brilliant" Work)

Someone who remains at their employer for long periods of time typically has learned to "pace themselves" and manages to do work on a day-to-day basis that is good but not necessarily extraordinary. This doesn't matter. I believe that the majority of the battle of being an excellent employee is simply showing up. Sure, some people can do extraordinary work. However, the brightest flame is not always the longest burning flame. The ability to consistently show up and do the work is the most important aspect of being a long-term performer in most organizations.

The smartest people out there are those who end up having the most problems. People who can consistently show up for work and do an excellent job send the message to colleagues, clients, and others that they have the ability to [get the job](#) done.

5. An Understanding of 'Insiders' and 'Outsiders' Typically Develops Between People Who Remain At Their Jobs For Long Periods of Time

After someone has been with an employer for an extended period of time, an understanding develops between that person and others who work there. An institutional understanding also develops. This understanding seems to say something to the effect of "people may come and go, but we are the ones who are committed to this organization and we are the heart and soul of this place." A similar sort of understanding that develops says, "we owe each other because we have each demonstrated a commitment."

Bonds form between people who've been part of the same organization for long periods of time. These bonds are often invisible—but they are real bonds. These bonds are powerful and make the organization and forces within it come to the defense of those who are committed to the organization during times of change and reorganization. These sorts of bonds get stronger over time as an organization changes. After some time, people who have been with the organization for decades are simply treated as part of the very fabric of that organization and are virtually unquestioned.

Conclusions

While it may seem odd for a recruiter to write a story in defense of people who remain with their employers for long periods of time, remaining with an organization is something that is meaningful in this day and age. There are many characteristics of people who remain at their jobs for long periods of time and these characteristics, in my experience, are usually found in those who are the most stable.

A final factor is that, in my experience, people who remain with an organization for long periods of time are often less tormented than the average person. By looking for reasons to like and respect their organization rather than find fault, they find themselves in organizations that ultimately welcome them.

Finally, it's always important to remember that if an organization has been around for 20 years or more, chances are it's doing some things very right. There will always be people who succeed in these organizations, and of course, there will always be those who leave or fail.

THE LESSON

Companies who have been around for long periods of time are usually doing something right, and people who remain with a single employer for long periods are usually considered stable and committed to their jobs. Concern yourself with doing the best job possible and look for reasons to like your organization, and you will find that the organization will welcome you and foster your long-term success.