



Job Jumping—Fitting Stereotype or the New Reality

By Amber Virgillo

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“Would I ever leave this company? Look, I’m all about loyalty. In fact, I feel like part of what I’m being paid for here is my loyalty. But if there were somewhere else that valued loyalty more highly, I’m going wherever they value loyalty the most.”
– Dwight Schrute, *The Office* (2008)

Is this what company loyalty means to us today? Do we subscribe to *The Office*’s character Dwight Schrute’s evaluation of when we should leave a company, or do loss prevention professionals continue to reflect and reward a more traditional definition that includes long-tenured employees?

Often we hear career histories discussed with words like “stability” and “consistency” as positives and instances of short tenure as negatives. This makes one wonder if short tenure is that negative, or is it a product of our ever-changing society? Is it a mindset that should be tossed out with VCR tapes and receipt rolls?

With the constant evolution of technology, communication, and transportation, are we still stuck in the 1950s when it comes to our resume mentalities? Especially in terms of the loss prevention industry where a professional typically has to move to find a broader multistore experience.

The subject was discussed with more than twenty-five LP practitioners to attempt to determine the following:

- Is so-called “job-jumping” really that negative, or is it an antiquated stereotype?
- Specific to the loss prevention industry, what causes people to change jobs and what are “acceptable” reasons for leaving?
- Does the loss prevention industry breed job-jumping?

People ROI

According to Dave Arnold, Ph.D., J.D., general counsel at Wonderlic, the average cost to an employer for hiring a mid-level LP practitioner that leaves within a short time can be more than \$30,000. The costs are found in advertising for the position, time to screen people, the individual’s learning curve, and the training and education investment in the first ninety days. Of course, the longer an employee works, the more up-front costs the employer recoups.

Arnold admits not all turnover is bad, stating, “Some turnover can actually help an organization as long as the people leaving are considered unproductive or the company has already recovered its payback for the initial costs.”

Wonderlic helps employers screen candidates to determine if they are a good fit for an organization using Internet-based screening tools. With clients across multiple industries, Arnold says, “The closer to the ball someone is—the smarter they should be,” when referring to Wonderlic’s screening work they conduct for the National Football League. Before investing in a candidate, wouldn’t it be nice to see how close to the ball the employer should put them?

“There is typically a significant investment in hiring an individual and if they leave within the first couple of years, it is likely you did not get an ROI on the hire,” says Shane Sturman, CPP, CFI, president at Wicklander-Zulawski and Associates via a post on the W-Z LinkedIn group. “Most companies have experienced spending significant time and effort in training and development just to see that

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investment jump ship at the first opportunity to earn a couple extra dollars. I agree that there are circumstances when it is necessary. However, when you see a history of job-hopping, it is a good indicator that there will be little loyalty with you as well. The best indicator of future behavior is past behavior.”

Job-Jumper Myths and Perspectives

In an article discussing job-hopping and other career fallacies by Monika Hamori in the Harvard Business Review (HBR), July-August 2010 issue, Hamori describes the cultural shift from companies rewarding loyalty with promotions to executives starting to move from one company to another to get ahead. According to HBR, the 1980s brought a shift in our loyalty thoughts as “firms stripped out layers of management, promotions became fewer and far between.”

HBR conducted a study of 14,000 non-CEO executives to compare the outcomes of their internal and external career moves. Hamori dispels the myth that job-jumpers ultimately prosper more than those more-tenured colleagues. “Overall, the more years people stayed with a company, the faster they made it to the top,” states Hamori.

But how does this research apply to the loss prevention industry? Are we more tolerant of job-jumpers because it seems the industry is full of them?

Chris O’Leary, president of Loss Prevention Recruiters, thinks when evaluating a resume or a professional’s experience, it’s important to ask the “why” question when there are multiple moves indicated on a resume.

“Each person’s resume is unique and contains varying professional and personal experiences,” says O’Leary, an expert, qualified search firm partner for retailers. “Ask the question and there may be logical responses, such as being tied to a certain geography for family reasons, aging parents, or other circumstances that require a job change. Not all reasons are good, but in my experience here are a few ‘right’ professional reasons:

- If you’re moving from single- to multi-store opportunity or any type of progression move upward;
- If you’re gaining experience in different loss prevention programs or strategies;
- If you’re gaining different types of retail experience in a new environment; or
- If you’re gaining experience in difficult markets or larger populated geographies.”

Some LP executives focus more on the “what” when it comes to evaluating job-jumpers’ resumes, specifically in terms of what has the candidate accomplished in his or her tenure at the company and did it make a significant impact.

“I don’t believe there is a magic number when it comes to timeframe at a company, but the critical component is the ability to work on specific projects and complete them,” says Daniel J. Doyle, who has enjoyed an extensive tenure at Bealls and is now their senior vice president of human resources and loss prevention administration.

“Sometimes people can make short-term gains by changing jobs frequently, but they are not able to build tenure-based

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retention tools like stock options and retirement. I've been extremely fortunate to be at Bealls for twenty years and there has always been opportunity for advancement within that time. But it is absolutely critical to stay open and willing to take on more opportunities that include other responsibilities you may have to grow into," adds Doyle.

Other perspectives believe the crux of the issue all depends on how committed the person is to each company they've worked for. Several LP practitioners made a point about having someone invested in the overall company mission and commented that level of commitment is only achieved over time.

"Have you ever known anyone to wash a rental car before they return it?" asks Pete Trexler, CFI, manager of loss prevention at Lumber Liquidators, illustrating the importance of an individual's commitment and ownership to the overall goals and objectives of the company. "In my opinion reasons for leaving fall into a few categories. Philosophy doesn't match with organizational goals, which usually equals poor results, lack of advancement opportunity, or family reasons such as geography or work life balance. Each of these categories has their own intricacies.

"We as investigators have to determine why our job candidates have left their other companies because if you want long-term investments in people, you have to determine what type of mentality they have. Either they have a 'get it now' tactical tendency or they believe in progressive loss prevention that involves predictive models/leading indicators, absorbing your retail partners' goals, and sales promotion. These strategic objectives take commitment," says Trexler.

Most loss prevention practitioners agree that consistently short tenure has a negative impact on your resume even if the reasons for changing are seen as legitimate across the industry. The issue it seems is that "legitimate reasons" are often left up to the specific interviewer's interpretation, and a positive or negative result could be the way the job candidate spins his or her past departures.

"Within the LP industry there is definitely no place to hide," says Johnny Custer, LPQ, CFI, manager of loss prevention operations for Merchant Analytic Solutions, referring to how small the loss prevention industry is and the importance of not burning bridges and being honest in the job-hunting process. "If you see a particular pattern of job-jumping, the question is raised, 'Does this person have a hard time assimilating or maybe it's as simple as their philosophy not matching the leadership's?'"

From an executive's perspective, Linda Heasley, president and chief executive of The Limited told The New York Times in July, "I like people who have demonstrated performance in a number of different places. They don't have to have stayed at the same place, but I like to see that they were at a place long enough to annualize things that they started and had time to build relationships. But I like the fact that people have moved and have had different experiences. Each of the places I went, I learned a tremendous amount and then was able to build on that." Evaluation regarding whether or not an individual has given enough time to establish key relationships was a big factor for both Heasley and a number of other retailers interviewed. Another important aspect of relationship building is internal within an executive's own LP team. Or if a member of

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that team, being a valued and contributing member to both strategic and execution tasks.

“If I see one- or two-year stints at a bunch of different companies on a resume, it’s definitely a negative right away,” says Brad King, vice president of loss prevention at BCBG. “Your career is a marathon, not a sprint, and it takes time at an organization to build and foster relationships within that company. An LP executive must build a lot of trust with other departments and especially with your new team. It’s critical to define tools that will work within the team and build a culture of executing both the LP team’s and company’s mission. Those types of high-level tasks take time to accomplish.”

While some professionals value time to build relationships, others focus on the shrink numbers and how they translate into long-term success of the executive.

“The real test of one’s proficiency and skill sets occurs after the fires are out and after the shrink has been reduced by 10 percent,” says Thomas Stein, an industry executive with more than twenty years experience. “Improving on or even sustaining great results is inherently more difficult than simply taking advantage of low-hanging fruit. Everyone can be a hero in the short term, but if you never stick around long enough to show continued, steady improvement or to give your current leadership the opportunity to recognize your talents and promote you to a position of greater responsibility, should I assume you’re running to a better job or away from too big of a challenge?”

Others interviewed immediately took the question of job-jumping as both a positive for the employer and the employee...within reason. “There are certain positive aspects

about individuals changing companies to both the employer and employee,” says Chris Barber, director of loss prevention at Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana. “I came from thirteen years with a big-box retailer with ample funds to build a quality loss prevention program. Now that I’m with a non-profit, I brought all those skills I learned in training and education with me. We don’t call that a job-jumper, it’s a ‘training transfer.’ I can now implement a successful program with all the tricks of the trade I learned at the big-box retailer, and my current employer didn’t have to invest in that training and education. From a personal perspective, I have a better quality of life because this organization requires a different level of time investment.”

In April of this year, the CBS Interactive Business Network (www.bnet.com) posted a blog by Penelope Trunk titled, “Why Job-Hoppers Make the Best Employees.” Trunk states, “If you think job-hopping is bad, change your thinking. Job-hoppers are not quitters. In fact, they make better coworkers and better employees, and I bet are generally more satisfied with their work life.”

One of the reasons Trunk gives is that ultimately job-hoppers are more loyal because loyalty is all about caring for other people and job-hoppers want their bosses to like them for a good references, coworkers to bond with them for potential networking, and to ensure everyone has a good experience with them so they don’t have to fix a bad first impression. It seems those views are a bit of a stretch. What do you think?

How Long Is Too Long?

When discussing the topic of job-jumping, there seems to be another side of this

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debate that is less divisive, but certainly has merit. When asked about how long is too long to stay at one company, the responses concluded there are inherent positives to staying in one company a long time (more than ten years), but there were also potential negatives.

“I always make sure that someone with a long tenure has taken on other responsibilities in their career,” says Dan Doyle of Bealls. “It’s important that people move through a company receiving various exposures and promotions over a lengthy time period. But overall, instances of long tenure are always far less concerning than those of rapid changes.”

HRB supports Doyle’s statement with their research saying, “Search consultants also tend to interpret frequent moves as a sign of bad decision making, whereas long organizational tenure is rarely seen as reaching a plateau.”

Pete Trexler states, “It’s all about life strategy and goals. You must know the goals of the people you are hiring. On the face of it, I would be extremely skeptical of a candidate who has a long tenure with a program that is known for ‘turn-and-burn’ LP. That person does not fit into our strategy of building a program that is progressive and flexible. When I see that type of experience, I don’t believe that person is willing to step out of their comfort zone to think progressively.”

“The convergence of experience, opportunity, and the right company culture is tantamount to winning the great job lottery,” says Tom Stein. “It’s what we all hope to find someday and it should be a recipe for long-term stability, economic and professional growth, and personal and professional satisfaction. If you are lucky

enough to find that perfect company and position, why would you ever leave?”

Some LP professionals’ lack of education or unwillingness to relocate has kept them stagnant in their careers. One LP manager suggested that there were no promotions or higher job classifications for him because he was not willing to relocate and doesn’t have a college degree. He has been more than willing to take on additional responsibilities and subordinates, but his company won’t acknowledge his desire to move through the ranks because of the lack of degree.

Chris O’Leary states this requirement for secondary education and certification is definitely on the rise. “The Loss Prevention Foundation’s certification courses, LPQualified and LPCertified, are the biggest thing to hit the industry since Wicklander-Zulawski and CFI,” says O’Leary. “Just take a look at the board of directors, and you’ll see they are the biggest retailers in the country backing this initiative, and its preference on job descriptions can’t be ignored.”

Does the LP Industry Breed Job-Jumping?

If most of the academic research suggests that job-jumping is a negative on the resume, why are so many loss prevention professionals’ careers plagued with short-tenure stints?

There is no scientific research to suggest that loss prevention professionals change jobs more than any other industry, but there does seem to be an overwhelming number of those “training transfers” that Chris Barber refers to above. One has to inquire, maybe it’s the industry? Maybe executives should get used to seeing short

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tenures at previous organizations and, frankly, get over it. Is job-jumping the new reality of the loss prevention industry?

“Not only in loss prevention, but the retail industry as a whole has a lot of turnover,” says one LP executive with more than ten years of experience whose company won’t allow him to speak on the record. “During my years with a big-box retailer, many store and district team leaders were lured to a competitor for slight increases in pay, hoping the environment of long-hours and strict rules was different. I think LP store personnel sometimes get disenchanted with their current employer’s rules on apprehensions, when they could go to another retailer with more lax policies for increased compensation.”

He offers another explanation saying, “It also could be a generational gap. Generation Y doesn’t like to wait on advancement. I believe that’s the main reason for all the job-hopping is the abundance of generation Y in the workforce.”

Cheryl Cran’s book *101 Ways to make Generations X, Y, and Zoomers Happy at Work* supports this executive’s comments stating, “The average Gen Y will change jobs up to twenty times in his or her lifetime...Gen Ys are not loyal to a company; instead they are loyal to their friends. If they feel their bosses or coworkers are like friends, they will stick around.”

No matter what generation or level in an LP structure, it’s always easy to be distracted by a bigger title or larger compensation packages. The HRB article suggests for any industry professional when making a switch to always consider long-term goals. A candidate would be wise to think two or three jobs ahead, instead of just the

opportunity he or she is facing.

Some individuals believe it’s about the way loss prevention’s roles are set up. “LP people are largely unsupervised and geographically distributed,” says an LP executive for an electronics retailer with more than twenty years experience. “It takes a special person to stay connected with the company goals and objectives largely being your own boss and controlling your schedule. I believe this breeds more job-jumping, because the LP professional isn’t engaged in the overall mission of the company unless their superiors work hard to include them.”

“I do believe the LP industry breeds job-jumping because to garner that multistore experience, a relocation is almost absolute,” says Chris Barber. “Many people are tied to a geography because of family or other circumstances. Loss prevention executives know to make it up the ladder, you must be willing to move where the business takes you.”

Lumber Liquidators’ Pete Trexler disagrees that the actual loss prevention industry breeds job-jumping and points the culprit toward the hiring executive instead. “We need to change the culture in our industry by not hiring people with job-hopping tendencies if that doesn’t fit our goals,” says Trexler. “As an industry and retail in general, we tend to quickly hire people to grease the squeaky wheel without fitting the person to our strategies first. In our get-it-now society there is a culture of getting what you want when you want it. As leaders in our organizations we should interview potential job candidates with the same fervor and intensity that we interview potential thieves. We are the best at that; let’s make sure we

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use that skill while hiring and teach it out to our partners. Once you have the right person, do what you can to keep them.”

“It hasn’t been my personal experience that loss prevention is full of job-hoppers,” says Johnny Custer. “I’ve always been surrounded by seasoned people that have long-term experience across multiple loss prevention disciplines. I definitely benefited from team members, supervisors, and mentors that helped guide me through my career. It’s important in this field of various opportunities to have someone with a broader perspective supporting you.”

Another aspect is a nature versus nurture angle as some LP professionals believe it’s just in people’s nature to be job-jumpers, never satisfied with the opportunity in front of them. “I came from a family where both parents worked at the same company for the majority of their career,” says Robert Bottass, regional loss prevention manager with CVS/Caremark. “I think some people continue to believe in the fallacy that the ‘grass is always greener on the other side of the fence,’ but in reality there are the same problems facing them with just different people or details.

“I disagree that LP breeds job-jumping, because if you look at top-performers in companies, they have typically held that position for a significant amount of time,” adds Bottass. “Or each time they moved, it was to take on greater responsibility and [they] were held to higher performance standards.”

It’s Your Career

Basketball great Michael Jordan once described his career this way, “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning

shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” Jordan’s legendary status is not characterized by all the mistakes he has made in his career, but his consistent success.

Wouldn’t it be nice if our career mistakes could be celebrated as learning experiences that motivate us instead of stereotyped as scars to rationalize? The opinions expressed by the professionals in this article don’t definitively answer the question of whether job-jumping is an old stereotype or new reality. Based on the feedback here, it seems a little bit of both. What do you think? Visit our blog at www.LPportal.com.

HRB’s final thought was, “What’s important is to look at each move with a critical eye, putting aside conventional wisdom and other people’s assumptions to make the choice that fits your own ambitions.”

“Today’s retail needs and environment require all of us to be extremely well-rounded business leaders, practitioners, and partners,” concludes Tom Stein. “A little segment diversity will go a long way in broadening your asset protection, business acumen, and operating knowledge and will make you more marketable long term.

“Most important of all, find a company that respects you, treats you as the professional subject-matter expert you are, and values the insight and experience you bring to the table. Remember that professional and personal happiness are not found in higher salaries or bigger titles. Enjoy what you’re doing, make the most of every opportunity you’re given, and leave every company and position in better shape than you found them.

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