

# Are Your Employees Trying to Extort You for More Money? Fire Them!

Dear Stephen:

*I am the regional sales vice president for a manufacturer. From time to time I have a sales employee openly come to me to disclose they have been approached by a competitor or recruiter about another sales job. It seems that my salespeople are using these approaches as a tool with which to posture for more money, better incentives, additional benefits, etc. They keep doing this as if they are more desirable employees just because they were approached for some random job for which they might not even be seriously considered. Why does this all feel like extortion? So far, no one that works here has ever received a firm offer, rather they just tell me someone called them about another job.*

*I am not impressed by these games.*

*We would love to get rid of some of these people. Many of the*

*employees who come to me with these stories are deadwood to begin with. None of them ever being hired by other companies seems to confirm this. They are all talk. They just want to let me know they got a call, as if it's some kind of backhanded insult or proof of their value. What's up with this? I have spoken to our HR department about it, and they are as nonplussed as I am. We honestly have our fingers crossed someone will poach away one of these people. Beyond everything else, this behavior is just plain annoying. If I tell them what I really think, which is "please take the other job," I am sending the message we do not care about our employees. If I enter into a dialogue about any sort of raise I'm just leading them on. I am not sure what I'm supposed to say. What's the right answer?*

*Yours,*

**Will You Take Them?**



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: [StephenSays@bellow.press](mailto:StephenSays@bellow.press).

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook, and follow him on LinkedIn.

Dear Will You Take Them:

No, I will not take them. I do, however, get this type of question from my clients all the time. Employees who tease their bosses with insinuated offers, or worse by showing them letters of interest and describing phone calls from their competitors, are all too common. You'd think they'd have better sense, alas many do not.

Let me start by breaking the question down into a few scenarios for clarity.

In one scenario, an employee — maybe someone you like and want to keep, maybe someone you don't like and are happy to see go, or maybe someone about who you don't have much of an opinion — has been offered a new job. They come to you and resign. You have the option of either saying goodbye and good luck or making them a counter offer to entice them to stay. Usually a counteroffer will mean 20 percent more money. In today's economy, I often suggest companies counter offer just about anyone, so long as the prospect of keeping them isn't anathema (which it, of course, never should be if they're working for you; more on this in a bit). Let's face facts, it will almost certainly cost you way more to replace them. Offer them more money. You don't have much to lose. You can always fire them six months later if you find they are becoming more expensive or more trouble than they are worth.

In a second scenario, a mediocre employee is teasing you by describing a call about a potential job. Maybe they even went on one interview. The first thing to do in this scenario is to ask them directly if the job was discussed on company time or over their company email. If nothing else, this question will catch them off guard and spook them a bit. Now that they are uncomfortable, explain to them you get these same exact calls all the time, and it would be stupid of them to

not explore all of their options, even from your competitors. Tell them they owe it to themselves or to their families to see if the grass really is greener (I would add that it rarely is). As long as they do it on their personal time rather than your company's time, it is their prerogative. After all, everyone has the right to change jobs. Employers should not be afraid of this.

We always tell clients and candidates the best time to look for a new job is when you do not need to. It's healthy for everyone to check out what other professional options might be available to them. Once this meeting is over I would suggest you start parading a bunch of sales candidates in front of all your employees. Conduct interviews in the conference room where everyone can peek in. If they want to tease you with another job, you have every right to do the same thing right back at them. Who knows? Maybe your second-rate salespeople might work a little bit harder.

It sounds like your scenario is a bit different from the first two: We'll call it scenario three. In this case an employee is just getting a phone call from a recruiter looking for bodies, and, for whatever reason, they feel like they can leverage these calls into a better situation. Maybe they even got a call directly from your competitor, a savvy manager who knows how to recruit or an HR person who has learned to use LinkedIn. As we both know, this sort of

phone call means very little, essentially nothing really. This is a case of an insecure (and likely inexperienced) salesperson who wants you to know someone else wants them. Like trying to make your girlfriend jealous, I have seen this sort of strategy blow up in the employee's face nine out of every 10 times they try it. Don't sweat it.

But here's the thing about scenario three: You, as the manager, aren't blameless. The first issue you have to address in this case is your managerial prowess. It sounds like you have some low performers who you have not had the guts to fire or the skill to inspire. Is there any personal issue holding you back from finding good replacements and trimming the fat? There must be something because you make it sound like these employees are lackluster or worse. Your question is a good one, but it should not even come up about people who are low performers. If you have employees you hope would leave, it then falls on you as a manager to do something about it. It is your responsibility to make them better salespeople through training and performance evaluation, and if none of this works, you need to find some legitimate reason to fire them. That's your job. Are you happy with mediocrity? Maybe that is why the recruiters are calling your employees instead of calling you.

**Stephen**