

Giving Workers a Reason to Quit at Amazon

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Years ago, we reported on Zappos' decision to offer employees a \$1,500 bonus to quit during its intensive, four-week training period. The thinking being, if they're not happy in their jobs at that point, why prolong the inevitable and suffer the consequences in the process.



Well, in case you haven't already heard, earlier this week, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos reported in his letter to shareholders that the online retailing behemoth has established a program called "Pay to Quit" that pays warehouse employees up to \$5,000 to leave.

Bezos spells out "Pay to Quit" this way in his [letter to shareholders](#) ...

"It was invented by the clever people at Zappos, and the Amazon fulfillment centers have been iterating on it. Pay to Quit is pretty simple. Once a year, we offer to pay our associates to quit. The first year the offer is made, it's for \$2,000. Then it goes up one thousand dollars a year until

it reaches \$5,000. The headline on the offer is 'Please Don't Take This Offer.' We hope they don't take the offer; we want them to stay. Why do we make this offer? The goal is to encourage folks to take a moment and think about what they really want. In the long-run, an employee staying somewhere they don't want to be isn't healthy for the employee or the company."

In a story in *The Tennessean*, an Amazon spokeswoman says only workers in the fulfillment centers, where customer orders are packed and shipped, are eligible for the program and that only a small percentage of employees take the company up on the offer. (Back in 2008, when we first wrote about the Zappos program, we were told only 2 percent of the trainees took the online shoe-and-clothing retailer up on its offer.)

Hearing about Amazon's decision to follow in Zappos' footsteps (excuse the pun), I tried to find other attempts at this, at decent-size organizations anyway, but came up empty handed. (If you're aware of any, let us know.)

But with Amazon's program getting the press attention it has, could that change?

I asked that question this afternoon to Joel Garfinkle, founder of [Garfinkle Executive Coaching](#) in Oakland, Calif., and author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. That's certainly possible, Garfinkle told me. "We live in a copycat world" and "a lot of people look to Jeff [Bezos] as the new Steve Jobs — someone who leads from the front and is willing to take risks," he said.

Garfinkle believes the approach might have some merit. "If you're neutral or positive about your job, you're not going to take [the offer to leave]," he says. "But if you're really on the fence or negative, it might be enough that you just might take it."

Much still needs to be measured, he adds, but at the end of the day it could very well lead to higher overall productivity.