LIVING | AT WORK

Employees are returning to work for former bosses — and loving it

Sal DeVito with his employee Eric Schutte

When ad man Eric Schutte wanted to change jobs, the first call he made was to his former boss, Sal DeVito, the co-founder and creative genius behind award-winning ad agency DeVito/Verdi near Union Square.

Schutte, who lives in Caldwell, NJ, was working for a larger firm and making good money, but it just wasn't right. "Sometimes you think the grass is greener on the other side of the street, but it's not," he says.

The 41-year-old's portfolio is flush with prize winning campaigns, and he accredits much of his success to what he learned at DeVito/Verdi. A habitual returner, Schutte has worked for the firm four different times over the course of his 19-year career.

"There's no weirdness when I leave, or when I come back," he says.

The relationship between DeVito/Verdi and its workers, past and present, is familial.

"Almost everyone who has ever worked here shows up at the Christmas party. It's like homecoming," says Schutte. And when Schutte is on someone else's payroll, DeVito just teases him, "You're cheating on me."

DeVito, for his part, doesn't get wound up when his workers leave. "They always come back," he says, noting that there are four returnees on his creative team now.

The situation between DeVito/Verdi and its employees is not an anomaly. A recent survey conducted by staffing firm Accountemps found that 23 percent of the workers polled who left their employers regretted doing so and would consider going back. Of those, 28 percent said they miss their workplace friends and colleagues, 27 percent admitted to leaving for the wrong reasons and 20 percent cited losing their relationships with a boss or mentor.

And while in the past many companies had policies against rehiring former employees, they are now starting to lift them. Research by advisory service Workplace Trends indicates that more than 65 percent of human-resources professionals and hiring managers say that they are open to bringing former employees back on board.

There is an economic factor to this, says Lee McEnany Caraher, author of "The Boomerang Principle: Inspire Lifetime Loyalty From Your Employees" (Routledge, out now.)

She says that with workers leaving their employers every three to five years, as opposed to every seven to 10 years just a decade ago, companies are beginning to recognize the benefits of hitting the ground running with rehires versus spending time and money to bring new hires up to speed. "Returnees have an advantage," Caraher says.

It's a sentiment that rings true to Dawn Fay, New York district president of staffing-services firm Robert Half International. "Companies have had success hiring workers who have a history with their organizations because they come in familiar with the organization, employees and how things work."

Publicist Nataly Blumberg of Great Neck, LI, is the perfect case in point. She worked on and off for Flatiron-based p.r. firm the Bromley Group for nearly two decades. Earlier in her career, she left the company to work for a competitor. Although she received a huge boost in pay, "they owned me," says Blumberg, adding that she was often required to work 20-hour days.

That isn't the situation at Bromley, where she works once again.

"They're flexible and know they can rely on me," she says, noting that she clocks in from home two or three days per week so that she can be available to her kids.