

# Golden Careers: Money Isn't Everything



## The Scenario

Everest Gibson, Vice President of Talent at the investment banking firm Golden, Inc., looked out over “The Farm” where banking analysts and associates, the company’s most junior employees, sat in long lines of cubicles. Just 30 minutes earlier, Golden’s CEO Richard Gregory had emailed them.

**From:** Richard Gregory  
**To:** Everest Gibson  
**Re:** Employee survey results

Everest—

I just saw the results from our most recent Q2 2023 employee survey. Besides the mass resignations and declining productivity that we’ve seen this year, morale continues to drop. If these trends continue, we will lose the people who will keep Golden on top. Let’s meet tomorrow morning. I want to hear your plans for reversing these trends.

Rich

**Richard Gregory**  
CEO  
Golden, Inc.

Everest had joined Golden 14 months earlier in September 2022 during a period of substantial turnover in the company’s executive team. Using their success in a previous role as a guide, they pushed Golden to reorganize work practices in its lower and midlevel ranks. Everest believed that greater specialization and division of work would unleash expertise and make individual contributors “an assembly line of

productivity” while enabling Golden to hire employees with a range of skills who would not need to ramp up a learning curve whenever Golden pursued opportunities.

Soon after this realignment, Golden’s revenue and profits had soared. Its market share of deals also increased. Golden’s leaders were ecstatic about the positive results, particularly because the bonus pool was the largest in company history. Stock analysts praised Everest for turning Golden into “an efficient machine” that somehow also provided the best compensation on Wall Street.

Everest was surprised, then, when several of Golden’s best associates quit shortly after they received their annual bonuses. Their exit interviews suggested various complaints:

- “I knew I would be working crazy hours, but I’m not a machine.”
- “I have no idea how my work connects to the whole deal.”
- “I have no input into anything besides the assumptions I make in the zillion spreadsheets I do, and my manager changes those most of the time.”

Everest attributed the complaints to younger employees having unrealistic expectations and Golden’s cultural resistance to any attempts to change.

Everest expected these issues to resolve themselves as the reorganization’s benefits became clearer, so they were dismayed when Golden lost two deals to General Capital, an upstart competitor that few at Golden had heard of. The clients’ comments about why they chose General over Golden were vague, but the one that Everest remembered highlighted General’s “teamwork and everyone there understanding our needs,” something that Golden had long been known for.

## The Conversation

A possible reason for Golden’s unsuccessful bids became clearer a few weeks ago when Julie Chen, the managing director responsible for one of these bids, charged into their office.

**Julie:** Everest, we need to talk about the people you’re hiring. These kids’ work was terrible. For instance, when we put our proposal before the client, there was total misalignment between the spreadsheet numbers and the PowerPoint deck, little understanding of the client’s corporate strategy, and no energy in the room.

**Everest:** Julie, we’re all disappointed, but I can assure you that we’re as selective as we’ve ever been. We’re hiring from the same schools, and we had more applicants than ever after our record year. Sometimes these things don’t work out.

Julie paused briefly before commenting as she left Everest's office.

**Julie:** Believe what you want, but it's not your neck on the line when we lose a deal we should have won. This is a slow-motion catastrophe that's your job to fix.

During the following weeks, Golden continued to lose deals. It was having difficulty recruiting new MBA graduates, and turnover among its most-promising employees continued despite an increase in base salaries that made Golden the best-paying firm in the industry. No one responded to emails after 4:30 p.m. Finally, a post from an ex-employee went viral: "I started at Golden expecting a lifetime career. I left a meaningless job. #AllthatglittersisnotGolden."

Everest left the office that night at 7:30 p.m. When they stepped into an Uber, they looked up at the dark office floors where Golden was headquartered. Those same floors looked like a beehive of activity when they left the office at 10:30 p.m. after their first day at Golden the previous year. As they thought about the meeting with Gregory, they wondered what they would say.

## Fast Facts: Golden, Inc.

- **Industry:** Financial services
- **Headquarters:** New York City, New York, USA
- **Revenue:** USD \$22 billion (in 2022)
- **Profits:** USD \$2.5 billion (in 2022)

## The Ask

1. **Help Everest diagnose what is happening at Golden and prepare for their meeting with Gregory.**

This Quick Case was prepared by Senior Editor John Lufkas of Harvard Business Publishing. HBR Quick Cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. They are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management. This publication may not be digitized, photocopied, or otherwise reproduced, posted, or transmitted without the permission of Harvard Business Publishing. Although based on real industries and despite occasional reference to actual companies, this Quick Case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Copyright © 2023 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation. All rights reserved.