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The Real Reasons Employees Leave, and How to Keep the Best

Why do people leave teams and organizations? The # 1 reason people leave jobs is because they fail to connect with their bosses as leaders and as people. People are rarely honest about why they leave a company. Too many associates that depart follow Jimmy Conway's advice (played by Robert DeNiro) in the 1990 hit movie "Goodfellas," who told Henry Hill (played by Ray Liotta), "Never rat on your friends and keep your mouth shut."

There is no upside incentive for the employee to be open and honest. Think about it! The primary reason people leave companies is because of the relationship and lack of emotional connection with their boss. However, it is almost never talked about in the exit interview. Why? Who wants to burn a bridge with a boss they may need for a future job reference? It is easier to talk about work/life balance, moving on to build skill sets, or the need to make more money. Salary is much further down the list as a reason to leave than what is usually reported in exit interviews. Companies need to think about their current game plan to keep your best people? While most companies talk a great deal about the need to retain the best people to sustain growth, they lack an integrated game plan to create retention momentum.

Leaders are personally accountable to acquire and retain the very best people. It is that simple. If they fail to recruit and retain the top talent, they will not sustain growth over time. At the end of the day, the effective leader must embrace a plan to retain the very best talent.

Emotional Connection Points

Emotional connections provide the fuel that greatly enhance retention. It is driven by the trust and development of the individual team members. It starts with building emotional connections with each team member.

The power of the "unexpected" is the most powerful way to emotionally connect with another person. Think about it! Does a person get more credit with their significant other when he sends a hand written note when they least expect it? Of course they do! The same concept applies to a person as a leader. It is the "unexpected" things a leader does that really make the difference. Some examples:

- * Write a personal handwritten note or send a greeting card to the spouses or significant others telling them what a difference their partner is making to the business.
- * Take the employee to breakfast, lunch or dinner (if appropriate) and ask them what "really matters" to them and what you can do as a leader to help them build their future dreams
- * Take the entire team out together to celebrate a special event.
- * Place a call to a significant influencer or key family member in their lives. The manager should make phone calls to fathers and mothers if they believe it will make a difference to the best employees. Managers should always ask permission first if they are going to contact anyone beyond the spouse. It is impossible to know without asking whether a call to someone's parents would be comfortable for an employee or not. Managers also should follow any laws or rules regarding employee privacy.
- * Create a surprise, fun outing as part of a team business trip.
- * Create local, fun activities for the team. These events are fun team activities that should be done during regular business hours to truly be appreciated. Weekend team activities that cut into individual personal time are almost always guaranteed to land with a giant thud. Remember, the team wants the manager to be a great leader. They are not looking for another weekend friend.
- * Utilize the boss to deliver special praise for a job well done in a one-on-one meeting

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with a team member. Engage the next person up on the hierarchy, to conduct a one-on-one meeting with the best performing team members. Again, this meeting should be unexpected and focus on results and accomplishments as well as the recognition of the unique strengths of the individual.

* Create an unexpected personalized memento for individual team members celebrating the accomplishment of a major event.

Retailer Connection

Ron Cox, an Ace Truvalue Hardware owner in Appleton, Wisconsin, represents a great example of emotionally connecting with employees. Ron sent a handwritten note and gift card to the significant other of each of his star employees to let them know how much their spouse meant to his store as a highly valued employee and person. These emotional connections will be transferred to the customer as Ron's staff "pays it forward." In the 2000 movie "Pay It Forward," Kevin Spacey indicated that sometimes the smallest things make the biggest difference and by using random acts of kindness you can "pay it forward." This will work very well from you to your employees and in turn to your customers.

Home Turf

Don't forget how the little things can make a huge difference. For example, managers can meet with employees on the employee's "home turf" instead of always having people meet in the manager's office. It is a sign of mutual respect. They will actually see the manager as a more confident and caring leader. The location of the meeting is a little thing that makes a big difference. Managers will increase their effectiveness as a leader when they visit their people's home turf regularly.

Make Time to Connect

Remember, people do not usually leave organizations. They leave their leaders. If the company loses enough good people, the organization will be unable to grow. The effective leader understands that emotional connections to the leader are the most powerful retention devices in the tool kit.

If this is all true, why do leaders so often fail to build these emotional connections with their people? Because it takes time and places many leaders outside their comfort zones, thus increasing their vulnerability. It is easier to tackle those 85 e-mails sitting in an inbox. What many leaders fail to realize is that they are actually more vulnerable if they choose not to invest the time to do it. How does the time needed to replace all the top talent compare with the investment a leader needs to make to emotionally connect with their people? They need to invest every day.

Adapted from article by Jim Welch.

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