



Why Employees Leave Their Managers

By Joel Garfinkle, Talent Management Magazine, August 2012

It's rare that employees quit because they are disgusted with an entire company. One of the top reasons employees cite when leaving a job is either disagreement with or disapproval of their immediate supervisor, according to Leigh Branham in *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*, based on 19,000 exit interviews conducted by the Saratoga Institute. An obnoxious manager can cause even the most loyal employee to consider a job change, especially if said employee sees little chance for a promotion or transfer.

When left unchecked, even small mistakes can fester into full-blown resentments. In an ideal environment, employees own their resentments and feel comfortable approaching a manager about them. But few workplaces are ideal, and it's the manager's responsibility to facilitate a healthy workplace.

Here's a list of five of the most common mistakes managers make when dealing with their teams and how to fix them:

1. **Not challenging employees:** Most employees dream of moving up and doing something more meaningful and challenging. Managers who never provide their team members with opportunities to take on complex assignments or learn new skills are sure to build resentment and prevent team members from reaching their potential.

What to do: Managers can keep a file listing team members' skills in one column and documenting stretch assignments or learning opportunities they have given them in another. Each team member should experience challenges regularly and equitably.

2. **Believing authority flows from a title:** Employees may give new managers the benefit of the doubt, but any real authority a leader has over his subordinates evaporates quickly unless he earns his team members' respect. Managers who bark orders and expect blind obedience are sure to drive away their best employees.

What to do: Reflecting on the many skills and experiences subordinates bring to the team can help managers understand that they are one piece of a much larger team. Managers who want to build legitimate influence should respect their team members as individuals and ensure that they have enough expertise or technical skill to act as a resource to their subordinates.

3. **Not providing feedback:** Adequate material compensation is critical to employee satisfaction, but so is giving employees a sense of professional accomplishment and growth. Effective managers achieve this by providing ongoing feedback and expressing their gratitude for quality work. Ineffective managers leave their employees steeped in frustration, confusion and doubt.

What to do: Adding a feedback column to the aforementioned stretch assignment file can help managers focus on providing regular feedback. Maintaining a higher ratio of positive to negative feedback is important. Also, praise should be descriptive and specific, and criticism should include clear expectations and highlight opportunities for improvement.

4. **Avoiding dirty work:** Employees have a phrase for bosses who consistently foist undesirable work on subordinates. It's called power-tripping. The most respected managers are willing to chip in and occasionally help out with the most dreaded tasks.

What to do: Managers who have slacked off in this regard should own the fact that they have not been doing their fair share. Once managers come to this realization, they should look for the first opportunity to pitch in and say something, such as "I just realized I haven't helped with the weekly summaries in forever. I'll handle it this week."

5. **Being unapproachable:** Perhaps managers are intimidating, aloof, too quick to criticize or unable to hold confidences. Whatever the cause, those who are unapproachable typically lack a clear understanding of their employees' strengths and weaknesses, share little about themselves and don't know how their team members feel about important issues.

What to do: Managers who realize they have been unapproachable should initiate informal check-ins, ask questions, solicit opinions and admit their mistakes. They also should not gossip, lie or explode at their employees. In short, they should work on their people skills.

Any manager who consistently makes these mistakes may need to do some lengthy reflection on how he or she interacts with both subordinates and colleagues.

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