Focus on Retention: Questions to Ask a New Employee

Description

When I hear from leaders, *staffing* is almost always at or near the top of the biggest issues they are facing. It seems we are constantly asking ourselves, *Do we have enough staff?* This question usually centers on the number of staff. If we are fortunate enough to have the needed numbers, then the discussion moves to items like, *What is the experience level of our staff?* Usually it is both. One, there's not enough staff, and two, there's a lot of inexperience in the staff.

There are no easy answers, or no answers at all. There are tools we've used in the past, ranging from compensation adjustments for current staff and to attract new staff, to sign-on bonuses for new hires, to referral bonuses to those who refer workers. There is nothing wrong with these options, but money-centered approaches don't provide a long-term solution.

Due to staff resignations, most organizations are doing their best to hire people. When we are in desperate need of staff, we tend to open the hiring doors wider. Last week's column had a "retention" message (click here to read), and I want to continue that focus this week.

Throughout this column, we will look at some questions we can ask new employees that will hopefully increase retention.

We will start with four questions that will help improve selection when asked by the person the new hire will report to:

1. *If you are offered this job (role) and accept it, what are you looking for in me as your manager* (or whatever term fits)*?*
2. *What are you looking for in your coworkers?*
3. *What will you be bringing to this role?*
4. *In six months when I ask your coworkers how it is to work with you, what will they say?*

These four questions typically prove to be effective when used in the hiring process. They improve retention because not only do the person's answers help ensure that they are a good fit, they provide insights on how everyone can best work together. The faster we can strengthen these work relationships, the more likely a new person is to stay.

Onboarding is the next key aspect of retention. In the past, a leader could wait 30 days to make sure the new staff member was adjusting. While a leader is always checking on new people, that 30-day meeting was a more in-depth session. We have to start these retention conversations on Day One. Thirty days is often too late. Some people call this a "stay" conversation.

It's a good idea to do a "battery check" regularly on new employees. Don't just ask, "How are you doing today?" This usually leads to a canned answer like "fine." Instead, ask, "How charged is your battery today?" If they respond with a low number like 50 percent, ask what's going on. This is a good conversation starter that lets you get to the bottom of what's troubling the new employee. You can take action to fix the issue or, at the very least, reassure them that it's normal to feel lost or overwhelmed at this point in their new role.

In the development of the Human Capital Ecosystem™, "belonging" is at the center. A key reason people leave early is feeling that they do not belong. As we discussed last week, they usually have left a job where they knew their boss, their coworkers, the company's processes and procedures, etc. Leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar is uncomfortable even in the best of times.

Dr. Katherine Meese and I have a book coming out that provides many ways to retain talent, and one of them is by fostering that sense of belonging. Pilot this tactic: Say, "We want you to feel this is the right place for you, a place where you feel you belong. What are some ways that we can help you feel you belong here?" This question shows interest and empathy, demonstrates listening, and ultimately helps provide those "belonging experiences." Incidentally, this works not only with new employees but with all staff at all experience levels.

The most recent data shows the number-one factor in retaining talent is perceived organizational support, and the number-two factor is trust in senior leadership. Both factors complement each other. We know that people will not say someone is supportive if they do not feel a sense of trust. I feel that most senior leadership teams are committed to supporting the staff and that they are trustworthy. However, due to the issues the pandemic brought, there have been many withdrawals from the emotional bank account—and these have drained the feeling of trust.

The key is to be direct. Ask those you lead: "Do you feel you have the support you need to do your job?" Many times, the support is there, and this question confirms that. If it is not, it leads to a discussion that may increase support. But even if the answer is not what the person hoped for, the trust quotient is increased. Even though it may sound good, it's always important to discuss how realistic and how doable it is.

These are only a few tactics. There are many more. In upcoming columns, there will be suggestions or solutions to improve staff retention based on great research by Dr. Katherine Meese. I look forward to sharing them with you. As always, thank you for reading and for working hard to make your own leadership and the organizations you work for better and better.

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