



How to Communicate When an Employee Leaves

Description

When speaking on leadership topics such as communication, I often explain to people that I am like a plumber whose own house has leaky pipes. (My apologies to all plumbers.) My point is that my companies often struggle with the exact same operational items that I am coaching and advising them on. We are all a work in progress.

Writing this weekly column creates a self-assessment time for me. Often, as I am writing, it becomes clear where our own gaps are and what we need to work on. Or I often realize we have a problem inside our company and think, *I bet others are having similar issues and might be able to learn from our journey*, so I share my experience in the column.

I recently realized that we had more gaps in communication than I would like, most notably in how we handle employees' leaving our organization. This column shares some of the communication gaps we discovered in the process, which we are now closing. I thought you might find our learning experience helpful.

Holes get filled. My experience has been that if there is a communication gap, it will be filled many times with misinformation, confusing information, and sometimes things that just aren't true.

When a person resigns, sometimes we let too much time go by before sending out information about that person's leaving. What often happens is that leaders don't send out a notice about the departure because they want to have a plan in place before making the announcement. While this sounds good in theory, it often creates a series of problems.

It is unlikely that the person quitting their job hasn't shared the news with others. Likely some of their coworkers knew they were looking or interviewing. Once they let their boss know they are leaving, if that leader doesn't announce the departure quickly, the rumor mill kicks in. (It will likely kick in anyway.) The more quickly the leader moves to make the announcement, the more they can control the narrative. By rationalizing that they need a plan in place before the announcement, the leader allows too much space in communication.

Here are some suggestions for a smoother transition for employee departures:

1. When a person resigns, discuss the communication process with them. This is particularly important if the person leaving is in a supervisory position. If you are comfortable, give the leader the opportunity to let their employees know before a companywide announcement goes out. Be really specific about the scheduling of the announcement. Set specific times for when the leader will let their employees know and when the general announcement will go out.
2. Do not wait till you have a plan. If you know you are going to fill the same position, make that part of the announcement. If you are going to take this time to look at the role, duties, etc. and decide the next

best steps, be sure to say that. Something like this works nicely: “With Bob’s leaving, it makes sense to step back and review the duties and responsibilities of that role in our organization. In the next several days, I will be meeting with many of you to get your thoughts. If you have specific suggestions, please set up a time to give me your feedback. I value your input.”

- When someone leaves the organization, it is a really good time to see if things need to be adjusted.

3. Another item that comes up is how long a person should stay once they have resigned. It is common for an hourly employee to give two weeks’ notice and for a person in supervision to provide 30 days. This can vary. The question is, on what terms is the person leaving? Most people are already mentally moving on to their new role when they resign. Sometimes we get hung up on the idea that if we are paying them, they should work their entire notice. This can work well with some people; however, there are times to move the transition up. By this, I mean pay the person the amount they would make if they stayed the entire notice period, but have them transition out as soon as you can. This allows them to move to their next role and allows your organization to move forward. I have seen organizations allow an unhappy person to stay the entire notice and create significant disruption in their final days on the job.

4. Having a standard operating procedure in place on how resignations are handled is invaluable. It allows your leaders to train on what right looks like in these situations, and it can help avoid a lot of wasted time and headaches. (Many simply will not know how best to handle things without some training.)

We missed on this one, which caused a lot of unnecessary confusion. However, it did shine a light on some inconsistencies we needed to fix, and hopefully others can learn from it. We are all on this journey together. Thank you for letting me have a seat on the bus.

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Author

quint-studer