



Taking the High Road: How Employees Leave an Organization Really Matters

Description

In every organization, there will be situations in which the “fit” is not right for some employees. As a result, employees are let go. In other cases, employees may decide to leave the organization on their own. Either way, how these departures occur really matters.

I have written for years that a good way to evaluate organizational values is how someone is treated on their way out. I am not talking about those situations where a person needs to be exited immediately due to inappropriate action or behavior. I am talking about those occasions when an employee, who after plenty of feedback, coaching, and time, just cannot meet the needed job expectations. And I’m talking about the employee who makes the decision to leave an organization because they feel there is a better fit and/or opportunity elsewhere.

Let us take time to look at each situation, starting with the person who isn’t meeting expectations. When this person was hired, they and their boss felt the job would be a good fit. As with any new job, both parties realized success would depend on the new hire’s developing the skills needed to be successful. Yes, it’s great if a person has a good attitude and a better-fitting job in the organization can be found—but many times, that is not possible. No matter how good the person’s attitude is, if they cannot attain the needed skills, they must be let go.

In such cases, it is important for the supervisor and company to do all they can to help the person leave in as positive a fashion as possible. This means the person is not surprised by the decision to be let go. They have been well communicated with along the way. It also means that the employer and supervisor discuss with them which career options may fit them better. It means discussing with the person how they would prefer the communication to their coworkers to happen on their departure.

It may also mean having outplacement services available to the person being let go. In other words, the employer pays a company that helps the person find a new job. I like outplacement services, because they meet with the employee right away and help them move forward. A company may even have the person who is leaving stay onsite and use company time and resources to find a job. This shows the employee the company cares about them as a person, even though they no longer work there.

Of course, even with these services, there will be times a person being let go will be angry. The key is for the company and the supervisor to stay on the high ground.

Now let's look at the scenario in which an employee quits. I have always felt it was inappropriate to make the statement, "They stole one of my employees." No one can "steal" anyone. People have the right to seek and accept a job that is a better fit. The employee is not yours. They are a person who works for the company. They are not owned by the company.

On a side note, I have never liked non-compete agreements. I understand a company's need to protect intellectual capital. Yet, non-competes (which vary by state) often limit a person's ability to stay in a community. Let's say a company in the same community wants to hire someone, yet due to a non-compete, the person must turn down a better job or move themselves and often their family to another town. If they stay, they know that the place they are currently working kept them from a better job. This can lead to hard feelings.

Anyway, let's say the person resigns. If they have been a solid employee (which they should be if still there), then the key is to discuss the best way for the person to exit. One can tell the values of the person leaving, and also the culture of the company, by how the departure takes place.

A good culture is one in which, if a person may be leaving, they let their boss know it is a possibility. This gives the company a chance to prepare for the departure with cross-training, etc.

In a good culture, people do not view an employee's interviewing elsewhere as a lack of loyalty. It is simply the person looking for a better fit or taking a better job. We once had an employee who wanted to move to Nashville, and she told us she was leaving. Because of her advance notice, she was able to work virtually from Nashville until she found a new job.

This past year, a Blue Wahoos employee let us know they were interviewing for a job in Triple-A. We are a minor league Double-A affiliate. For many, this move is a promotion since it is closer to the major leagues. We understood and supported this employee. Once they got the offer, the person then decided to stay with the Wahoos for at least another year. Yet if they had decided to leave, then the discussion would have been around what makes sense.

For example, it may be the person has a 30-day notice clause. If so, does it make sense for the person to leave sooner? If they stay 30 days, then what is the best use of the person's time? Sometimes it may work for the person to stay longer, but sometimes not. A good company will want the new hire to leave their current company the right way. After all, they know that the person will treat them the same way someday.

When I was at Studer Group, this was often an item of discussion. If the person who was leaving oversaw an important quality survey, they would typically want to stay until the survey was over. Our

answer was always, *Yes, we want you to stay*. This scenario is impressive to the current employer, the new employer, and the person who is leaving. It shows that each party respects the others.

Discuss with the person how they want their departure handled. In all situations, conduct an exit interview. This allows you to learn from the person leaving what they liked and what you might want to improve. The worst thing to do when a good employee quits is to exit them immediately. This sends the message, *We care about you only when you are working here*.

Departures are often emotional on all sides. While not easy, the higher the ground the company stays on, the better for all. It is the right thing to do. Besides, you never know: The person leaving may want to come back someday or send another good person your way. It's better for all concerned when people leave with dignity and mutual respect.

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