

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

A fast-read source of information to help managers communicate better within and between departments, twice a month.

February 17, 2020



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Why good employees quit – and what you can do to prevent it

Here are 5 mistakes even great managers make sometimes

You're a great leader, and no one would ever quit on you – until they do.

You're left scratching your head (and scrambling to find a replacement).

Even great managers and supervisors make mistakes that compel employees to quit.

"Losing an employee can have a drastic effect on team morale and result in a domino effect that leads to poor performance and productivity. Not to mention, it is expensive," says Jon Christiansen, a principle at Sparks Research and host of the podcast The Modern Polymath.

Leaders do all they can to keep employees happy and on the job, but Christiansen found they often unwittingly make mistakes that upset employees and drive them to quit.

Here are five of the big mistakes and how to avoid them.

1. Stifle work

Some leaders hold employees back from doing their best work by not giving them enough information, resources or autonomy.

Perhaps employees have to wait for approval or collaboration. Meanwhile they could charge ahead if permitted. They feel powerless and less respected.

Better: Consider two things when you evaluate job duties and performance: how much control employees have over their outcomes and how much control you have over

*Please see **Quit ...** on Page 2.*

Sharpen Your Judgment

Did taking leave put worker in the hot seat?

"I know you're taking leave next week for surgery, so the timing isn't great," said Lynn, the supervisor, to her employee Sue.

"But I wanted to talk to you before you go. I have concerns about your performance."

"You do? But my last performance review was fine," Sue replied.

Lynn shook her head. "Since then, we've had complaints from both your clients and some of your co-workers. I wanted to let you know I'm going to put you on a performance improvement plan when you get back."

"Is this about the timing of my leave? I know you weren't happy I was going to be out during our busy season," Sue said.

Lynn sighed. "Your leave doesn't have anything to do with it. This is about your overall performance."

Were they being too hard on her?

When Sue came back from leave, the performance improvement plan didn't go well.

"No one else gets scrutinized like this!" Sue complained. She asked to transfer to another department, but the company refused the transfer.

Next, Sue sued for retaliation under the Family Medical Leave Act.

The company tried to have the case dismissed.

Did it win?

This regular feature sharpens your thinking and helps keep both you and your firm out of trouble. It describes a real legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

Make your decision, then please turn to Page 4 for the court's ruling.

The Purpose of Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors

Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors provides relevant and actionable business ideas to help managers and supervisors improve communication and increase effectiveness.

The Bulletin helps improve communication within and between departments, a major goal for most businesses seeking better performance.

All in a fast-read format, twice a month.

Quit ...

(continued from Page 1)

the constraints on them. Look for ways to increase their control and lessen your constraints.

2. Set inconsistent expectations

Managers sometimes create conflicting expectations, and it stresses good employees.

For instance, a leader tells employees quality is the priority. Yet, he rewards employees for quantity. Employees want to hand in great work, but they know they'll reap rewards for handing in more work, so their stress rises and they start to hate their jobs.

Better: Write down your goals and expectations for employees to see if any contradict or overlap. Make changes, clarify, share and review regularly.

3. Give overly easy assignments

Good employees excel, but managers sometimes mistake over-qualification for excellent work.

Employees then might take longer just to fill the time. Easy – or too little – work bores them.

Better: Talk with stable performers about their interests and more challenging work. Give them

assignments to build knowledge and skills. Include learning opportunities, new goals and a roadmap for growth.

4. Waste resources

Managers sometimes waste time and talent by having employees spend too much time in meetings or on low-priority tasks. Employees would prefer productive, challenging work, which frustrates them.

Better: Create lists that rank the importance of employees' tasks based around individual or team goals. Work together to set the right priorities and deadlines based on their workload.

5. Create the wrong environment

Managers who fail to create the right work environment lose employees. Extremes are dangerous:

- **Too harsh.** Employees will wither in environments where ideas are shot down with hostility, and aggressiveness is rewarded.
- **Too safe.** Employees won't thrive if they don't feel some pressure and proof that their work matters.

Better: Create a healthy work environment by soliciting feedback, responding respectfully and getting input on decisions. Give regular feedback – positive and negative – thoughtfully and without judgment.

Source: Harvard Business Review, tinyurl.com/quit470

TECH CORNER

'Urgent' email in your inbox? Keep these pointers in mind

It's Murphy's Law: The busier you are, the more you can count on "urgent" emails arriving in your inbox!

The ultimate irony?

Nine times out of 10, these urgent messages aren't all that critical.

(The senders might not agree, of course.)

Put ball back in their court

How do you respond tactfully and manage expectations without stopping what you're doing?

Try these three suggestions:

1. **Find out the level of urgency.** Ask when a response is really needed.

Urgent doesn't always mean immediate. The sender may simply be anxious about a problem or project.

2. **Give a timeline.** The sender may only need a plan of action, not the resolution, right away. Write something like: "I can get you an answer by noon tomorrow. Will that work?"

3. **Get feedback.** The sender's request may require that you postpone some initiatives that you're both working on together.

So ask the sender how he or she thinks the work should be prioritized.

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ 5 phrases that will help you resolve conflict

Got conflict?

If you're a leader, of course you do. While conflict might sound – and feel – stressful, it's also an opportunity for positive change.

You can ignite that change by saying the right things, according to Lolly Daskal, an executive leadership coach.

Try any of these:

- *I sense that you're feeling emotional about this topic. Is that right?*
- *Let's all take a breather before we think through this.*
- *Thank you for your candor. I appreciate your feedback.*
- *Tell me more. I want to completely understand.*
- *How can I support you?*

Source: tinyurl.com/conflict470

■ 3 questions you want to ask employees regularly

Most leaders want to see progress in their employees, projects and careers.

To help everyone avoid stagnation, here are three questions Dan Rockwell, a leadership expert, suggests you ask and respond to regularly:

- **What do we need to stop?** The point of this question is to help everyone get away from busyness and focus on what matters most – the things that make them and your department happy and successful.
- **What opportunity do you want to seize?** This is meant to move people from the "fix a problem" mentality to "seize an uncaptured opportunity" mentality, where everyone can build on success.
- **What's important to you about the opportunity?** Help employees connect the action/opportunity to the purpose, and they're even more poised for success.

Source: tinyurl.com/3questions470

Real Problems, Real Solutions

Our subscribers come from a broad range of organizations, large and small. In this regular networking feature, three of them share their successes in improving workplace communication.

1 2 powerful ways to thank, motivate employees

When employees work hard, you want to regularly thank and reward them for their efforts ... without breaking the bank.

Sure, praise and gratitude are free to give, but sometimes a little more goes a long way in motivating employees.

I've found two cool tactics that have worked time and again for different leaders in varying industries.

Pick a favorite

Designate one day a month – for instance, the last Friday – to celebrate upcoming anniversaries and previous accomplishments. Senior leaders can

cook a waffle breakfast for everyone or just bring in coffee and bagels.

Another great tool: Use common areas for managers and employees to give shout-outs for great work or kindness.

Try rotating screens or use Slack to create a #recognitionwall to share praise in the app. Or use chalkboards where people can write messages – or a blank wall where they can post notecards.

Both are personal and motivational.

(Mike Ganino, Company Culture Advisor, shared his success on American Express Open Forum)

2 Got staff's feedback, buy-in: Cut hazards

As part of our focus on risk reduction on the production floor, we encouraged employees to speak up and share ideas on how to eliminate risks.

We incorporated this approach into our management system, which provided us with a very structured framework for how we limit risks and manage them.

This also changed our employees' outlook about safety.

They used to look at it as something extra to do.

Now they consider safety a crucial part of their everyday jobs.

Saw words put into action

Employees' attitudes really started to change once they saw the company acting on their ideas.

We've reduced our injury rate 70% over the last 10 years.

(Nancy Case, VP EH&S, Mosaic Company, Lithia, FL, presenting at the National Safety Council 2019 Congress and Expo)

3 Delegating got easier by using checklists

In the past, I struggled to delegate tasks clearly.

I'd ask employees to handle something, and they'd do it. But they didn't follow-up or consider the job their responsibility.

They saw everything as my job – they were just pitching in to help.

I needed to make it clear who was in charge of what.

Writing it down did the trick

To eliminate any doubt, I wrote checklists for each job, outlining exactly what employees needed to do.

For example, I put someone in charge of checking for safety hazards and repair issues.

We also started meeting regularly to talk about new problems that came up week to week.

The new system makes a huge difference. Now everyone knows what they're supposed to do, and they don't expect me to handle it all.

(Angela Policano, Director and Owner, Clarksburg Beauty Academy, Clarksburg, WV)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ 'OK, Boomer' is OK in the workplace, right?

Question: We have a multigenerational group. They work well together and have fun – lots of sharing and joking. I've heard the newer employees say, "OK, Boomer," and the veteran employees say, "OK, reenter." That's OK, right?

Answer: No, it's not, says Anthony J. Oncidi, head of the labor & employment law group at Proskauer Rose LLP.

Both phrases point to generational differences. "OK, Boomer" is a sarcastic reference to someone's age and novice with new technology. It can constitute a hostile work environment under the Age Discrimination Act, which protects employees over 40, Oncidi says.

It's a good time to retrain all generations so they understand derogatory or dismissive comments related to gender, race, religion, national origin, disability and sexual orientation are inappropriate.

Source: tinyurl.com/boomer470

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Signs: Important for safety, awareness and laughs

Signs at work are important to keep employees safe and aware.

Some signs are good for laughs, too:

- Caution: This machine has no brain. Use your own.
- For help: 1) Push the red button or 2) Yell!
- In case of fire: Wake sleeping employees and leave as quickly as you do at closing time.
- PULL: You can have things your way and push if you want, but this door is pretty stubborn.
- Please do not block these doors unless we say, "Ah right then, just this once."

Source: tinyurl.com/signs470

COMMUNICATION NEWS

What you can do about toxic employees

Toxic employees destroy morale, quality and productivity. Leaders need to get rid of them.

But knowing who's toxic is tough. They're often disguised by confidence and a network of followers who camouflage and protect them.

Identify where toxicity comes from, and you can fix it. Toxic employees are:

- **Self-centered.** They're interested in themselves and don't share the company's values, cooperate or work well with the team.
- **Dubious.** They quietly keep valuable information or tools that could help others and secretly pit people or groups against each other.

- **Unpredictable.** They don't appropriately deal with their negative emotions. They might resort to bouts of anger and yelling.

Find your allies

Take these steps to deal with them:

- **Keep your ear to the ground.** Listen and watch for the three negative behaviors.
- **Create a set of allies** who evaluate and develop a plan to identify and coach toxic employees back to good standing.
- **Discipline** up to and including termination.

Source: tinyurl.com/toxic470, tinyurl.com/toxicstats470

Do your company's employees want more feedback?

Most supervisors think they do a good job of giving staffers feedback, but that may not be how employees see it.

Employee surveys by Cornerstone OnDemand have found workers go months on the job without receiving valuable feedback from their managers – whether it's good, bad or indifferent.

Half need more frequent feedback

Believe it or not, the surveys have shown workers keep track of how often they receive

feedback (presumably for self-improvement and performance reviews).

Bottom line: People want to know how they're doing at their jobs and, even more importantly, care about their duties.

Consider asking staffers how they think they're doing and if they have questions about their skills, performance level, etc.

Those who say they'd like more feedback could benefit from frequent one-on-one meetings to fill in the blanks.

Quotes

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.

– Peter Drucker

What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside you.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living.

Gail Sheehy

EDITORS:
SCOTT BALL
sball@pbp.com

MICHELE MCGOVERN
mmcgovern@pbp.com

MANAGING EDITOR:
RENEE COCCHI

PRODUCTION EDITOR:
JEN ERB

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:
CURT BROWN

Subscriptions: 800-220-5000

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Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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No. The company lost, and Sue was allowed to pursue her lawsuit.

The company argued Sue's performance had dropped and needed to get back on track. It said the timing near Sue's Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) request was just a coincidence.

It also argued putting Sue on an improvement plan wasn't the same as firing someone – and didn't qualify as an "adverse action."

But Sue pointed to past positive performance reviews. She noted the improvement plan wasn't mentioned until after she requested leave.

The court agreed Sue may have a case and that it should be heard by a jury.

The court said the improvement plan did qualify as an adverse action. In addition, the timing of the company's scrutiny was suspicious.

Analysis: 'Bad timing' can sink a case

There aren't any laws that protect poor performance – as long as that performance is well-documented.

But well-documented means documented over time. Be careful about addressing issues suddenly, especially if an employee's recently requested leave or made a complaint.

(Based on *Worst v. Glynn County School District*. Dramatized for effect.)