Wendy Riemann: People leave bosses, not jobs, so provide good, regular feedback

Posted on Thursday, Mar 1, 2018

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Managers offering feedback to employees at work these days is often like visiting Baskin Robbins – a manager needs 31 flavors of feedback options – because everyone has their own unique preference.

While some are eager to blame this need to individualize on Generation Z and Millennials entering the workforce, it is not all bad. In fact, updating how we provide feedback can benefit managers, employees, and the workplace, in both the short and long-run.

A survey by Gallup a few years ago found that about 50 percent of people have left a job because of a boss. This is consistent with other surveys: in short, people leave bosses, not jobs.

If an employee views communication from their manager as either poor, lacking, or negative, it can lead to that employee starting to look for a new job.

While a Boomer's mentality may be that all is well unless the boss says otherwise (or they do not ask for more feedback for fear of being micromanaged), younger generations grew up connected and want regular feedback, even if Millennials do not ask for it. Although it may create more work at the onset, better communication between bosses and staff yields positive returns.

Providing feedback in the "older" days, and often still today, may include an annual review, and (hopefully) 5-7 positive statements for each negative statement. For many, annual reviews have become so bogged down in legalities, that feedback can often lack guidance or clear expectations for the employee.

There is no exact science for who wants what type of feedback (31 flavors, remember!?), so managers should make time to have that conversation with each employee to find common ground. Ask questions like, "How could we do this better?" or "Would you like more or less feedback?" and genuinely listen to the answer.

The first goal for feedback should be that it is more regular and/or in real time. This does not mean there is a formal office sit-down every Friday at 3 p.m., but rather offering acknowledgement and input on a more regular basis. For instance, saying immediately after a meeting, "Great job on that presentation, I can tell you spent a lot of time preparing." This can help build the confidence of the employee and lead to better future conversations. (Sidenote: high performers tend to thrive on feedback).

The second goal for providing feedback is that it should be done in a more positive way, i.e. you catch more flies with honey. The same Gallup poll found that employees who felt their manager provided feedback focused more on their strengths were more engaged at work, while those employees who felt their manager focused more on weaknesses, were disengaged. The first and second goals can be combined by saying something like, "You really have the customer service angle down, so why don't we spend next week focusing on building more of your technical skillset. That way, later in the year you'll be able to easily do either job."

Finally, if any feedback could be portrayed as negative, it is almost always better to discuss it, not email or text it. Tone and non-verbal cues matters.

Managers often have the greatest impact on driving performance and engaging the team through strong communication with employees. They are the boss AND the coach, so they need to be given the tools to succeed.

Offering better communication and providing more feedback is not catering to "snowflakes," it is a strong management decision and good for the bottom-line.

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