

“ HANDLING THE RESIGNATION OF A VALUABLE EMPLOYEE ”



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Another day with business as usual, and one of your valued employees knocks on your door and asks to speak with you privately. You invite him into your office, and his discomfort makes it apparent that he is feeling uneasy. “I really wasn’t looking for this,” he starts out, “but I got a call from a recruiter a few months ago about this opportunity at another company. I thought it wouldn’t hurt just to check it out. Long story short, they made me a good offer which I have accepted.”

This scenario is one that every manager dreads: losing a valuable employee unexpectedly, and especially when you didn’t see it coming. What should you do now?

First, what not to do: Don’t get frantic. Perhaps you should have cross trained others or better documented his activities, but since you did not, let this be one of your “lessons learned” in your role as leader.

Counter offers rarely work, and can make the situation worse: the employee feels resentful that it took his resigning to get the recognition that he may have felt he deserved all along. His co-workers observe your reactionary behavior and feel slighted that you allowed yourself to be manipulated by their less dedicated colleague.

So what is the best way to handle this situation when a valued and valuable employee says that he is going elsewhere? Sincerely congratulating him, thanking him for his contributions and wishing him well is the smartest move. This is a positive and mature response that sets the tone for an open and honest discussion that can follow.

“Jason, I am very happy that you found something new that you feel will better suit your needs. Of course I am disappointed that you are leaving, you have been doing such a terrific job for us, particularly on the Abbott project. If you are open to sharing with me, I would like to better understand the underlying motivation for your leaving.”

An insightful leader knows that it is also quite possible that it might be something about his or her own behavior or leadership style that may have influenced the employee to look elsewhere.

“Jason, I need to ask if there was something that I could have done differently or better that may have made a difference in your decision?” If the employee is brave enough to share the truth with you, thank him for his honesty and learn from any feedback that may be revealed.

Finally, and probably most important, remember to leave the door open for him to return if things do not work out, but only if he is someone that you would hire again unconditionally. Everyone makes mistakes, and can be tempted by something new and different. It also is not uncommon for some organizations to withhold or distort information about the job or company in order to entice a candidate on board.

Unless you let him know that he would be welcomed back, the employee is not likely to approach you to return, feeling embarrassed with his error in judgment, and regretting that he put you, his co-workers and himself through all that he did by leaving. Extending the invitation to return keeps options open and maintains the valuable relationship as well.

Adapted from the author’s column, previously published in the Syracuse Post Standard