

THE RESOURCE

HR INSIGHTS

VOL. XI, ISSUE I

magazine

from the eyes of industry leaders

2022 LEADERSHIP



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Aftermath: The Labor Drought

In the last issue we discussed The Labor Crisis, referring to the Government assistance & incentives, COVID challenges, etc. - as **THE PERFECT STORM**. Now we're facing the Aftermath of that perfect storm, and dealing with...The Labor Drought.

The aforementioned "perfect storm" challenges, as well as the abundance of opportunities available for workers has resulted in a limited supply of people who are looking for jobs. We are also in the midst of a "turnover tsunami" as we emerge from the pandemic. 52% of employees say they will be looking for a new job (*Achievers*).

These factors continue to make it very difficult to attract and retain talent! And...these challenges are likely to continue. Another important element of this Labor Drought is the Great Sansdemic. Haven't heard of it? You're not alone. But, it's very real, and will have ongoing impact on the labor market.

The U.S. is suffering from the beginning phases of a Sansdemic (**SANSDEMIC: sans** - without, **demic** - people). By 2028, it is predicted that we will have a deficit of 6 million workers. A report by EMSI shares details on the Sandemic and how it will transform the labor market - "*The Demographic Drought*". Contributing factors of the Sansdemic include Baby Boomers Retiring (earlier in many cases), Boomer Wealth accumulated and being passed down, Low Birth Rates, Record Low Labor Force Participation, as well as the impact of Video Games and the Opioid Epidemic on Gen Y & Z (particularly Males).

The Bottom Line: The extremely challenging environment to recruit and retain employees that COVID brought on - is here to stay. COVID may very well have shown a light on (and exacerbated) a problem we were already facing, but were turning a blind eye to - the SANSDEMIC.

So, how are we going to face these ongoing challenges - this Labor Drought - inside our organizations?

Poll your organization on the employment factors below. Are your requirements and expectations realistic? Are they competitive in your industry? What could be re-evaluated?

- **Do you Drug Test?**
- **Have you relaxed your Background Requirements?**
- **Have you raised your pay rates in the last 3 months?**
- **Have you relaxed job experience expectations?**
- **Are you offering remote work or flexible work options?**

Now is an important time to audit your organization and ensure you're: promoting the 'Pillars of a Positive Work Culture', providing competitive compensation, gathering Employee Feedback, considering Leadership Development & Coaching, evaluating your Onboarding & Training Programs, and reviewing your Benefits package. We're happy to help you get started!

THE RESOURCE

"What is one thing you could change or implement that would have an immediate, positive impact on your work culture? If you don't know - ASK!"

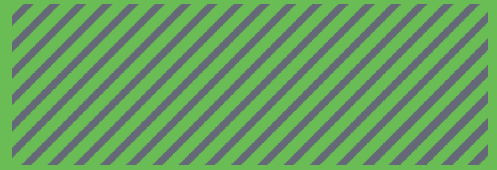


Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Hartung". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Hartung, CEO

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BECOMING NIMBLE

at Dealing with Ever-Changing Plans

BY LEO BABAUTA

With the world in so much flux these days, many of us are noticing how difficult it can be to deal with ever-changing plans.

It's always been a challenge, but as with so many things, it's become an in-your-face challenge these days.

Some people really struggle when plans are always changing — it can be frustrating and feel like there's no solid ground under our feet. Other people seem to love having no solid plans ... but their challenge is often that they can't seem to commit to anything regular, don't want to be tied down, and often have difficulty focusing.

TODAY I'M TALKING TO THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH RAPIDLY CHANGING PLANS.

What if you could learn to be nimble, flexible, and resilient when plans are always changing? What if you could find focus in the middle of the chaos, and calm in the middle of the storm? What if you could learn to flow like a surfer riding a wave?

This is the promise of learning to relax with uncertainty and navigate uncertain waters.

Let's talk about some key ideas ...

EVERY CHANGE IS A TRAINING.

When someone changes plans on us, we can (and often will) get frustrated with them for changing things up on us at the last minute. And while we can talk with them about it if it becomes an ongoing problem ... sometimes changes are unavoidable. What if, instead, we embraced the change as a training opportunity to get better at being flexible, nimble and resilient with change?

We could then find gratitude for this beautiful training opportunity. Thank the person. And then turn towards our own frustration or resistance to change, as a way to grow in this area.

USE CHANGES TO STAY PRESENT.

The Training we can do, when presented with the opportunity of a change in plans, can simply be to remember to be present – to be open to the experience of the present moment. Simply open to the experience of the present moment. When we're frustrated with changes, it's because we are fixated on what we expected things to be, on what is no longer true. What if we focused instead on what is right in front of us, the reality on the ground?

In this way, change training is simply mindfulness training; learning to be open to the moment that is unfolding, unpredictable, and unplanned, but still breathtakingly wondrous.

LEARN TO RELAX WITH UNCERTAINTY.

When a change in plans presents itself, we often feel a tug of uncertainty at our hearts. It's the feeling of the rug being yanked from under us — yikes, things are not stable! So we feel a moment of fear. That can then be turned into a train of thought: "Why do they always have to change things up on me, why can't we just stick to plans, why can't I just have one day of peace?" And so on, until we've turned a momentary feeling of uncertainty into a huge deal.

What if, instead, we could feel the sensation of uncertainty in our bodies and simply turn our attention on it and be with it? What if we could practice relaxing with the uncertainty? It doesn't have to be turned into a frustrating narrative (though that might still happen) but could simply be a direct experience of change.

PRACTICE FLOWING WITH CHANGES.

Once we learn to relax with uncertainty and open to the unfolding ever-changing moment ... we can learn to flow. Like a surfer flowing with a wave that's always changing. It can actually be fun! Let's see how good I can get at flow, let's see how nimble I can get with change, let's see how resilient I can be with uncertainty.



That means when there's a change, we can relax with the uncertainty, and then make a very simple decision: what is best here? Then take that next simple step, with ease.

YOU CAN FIND FOCUS IN CHAOS, WITH PRACTICE.

With a lot of changes, we can have difficulty finding focus. It's chaotic! I can't focus! Actually, we can find focus, but it can take some practice.

The practice is simply this: pause to consider what you'd like to focus on. If you're feeling chaotic, turn toward the sensation of that, and relax with it. Then create the space to focus, if possible — if you don't have the time, you can simply do it when the space is available. But a

lot of people actually have the time; they just don't allow themselves to focus because they're feeling chaotic.

Even if it's 10 minutes of focus, you can practice it. Clear the space, give yourself one thing to do. Make it your entire universe. Pour yourself fully into it. Come back to this focus when your mind gets distracted. Keep practicing!

STRUCTURE IS VERY HELPFUL, BUT DON'T BE ATTACHED.

I highly recommend structure as a way to create a little order for what you need to take on. If you need to regularly do some focus work, but also email, messages, finances, chores, planning, exercise ... create spots in your day or week for all of these. It will help you actually get the important commitments done.

That said, when we get too attached to our structures, we can get frustrated when things get messy. Maybe someone sprung something on us. Maybe something unexpected came up. Maybe we don't stick to the structure because we're tired, and things get sidetracked. When these things happen, it feels like everything has fallen apart, and then we can get frustrated, discouraged, and lose focus or motivation.

The practice can simply be to hold the structures with as much discipline as we can, but without attachment. That means hold to them as much as we're able to, but then when things change, practice flow. What needs to be adjusted in the moment when there's a change? What would be best now that the structure isn't possible at the moment? Then once we've made an adjustment, we can simply return to the structure as soon as possible.

COULD YOU FIND JOY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM?

Things can feel very stormy and, for a lot of people, that can bring anxiety and frustration. But what if we can learn to open up to the storm, to embrace it? To find the beauty in the chaos of the storm?

In my life, I have come to feel awe at the powerful beauty of storms, to delight in their swirls and unpredictability, to see the art in the middle of the gale. When I see this in an actual storm, it reminds me to practice seeing this in the chaos of my daily life. What beauty can you find in the chaos of your life today? ■

Leo Babauta is a writer, former journalist and former editor of the Pacific Daily News. Babauta is a Top 100 blogger, as the creator of the popular Zen Habits blog and author of the best-selling book, The Power of Less. He is married to Eva Cruz Babauta and has six children: Chloe, Justin, Rain, Maia, Seth and Noelle.

How to Transform the Return to the Office into a Celebration of Togetherness

BY LAURA KRISKA



For most people, the shift to working from home at the start of the pandemic was abrupt, involuntary, and stressful. As many employees begin to return to the workplace after an extended time away (nearly two years, for some), it's normal for them to feel some uncertainty about this change. If handled well, however, the return to the workplace can be a positive event.

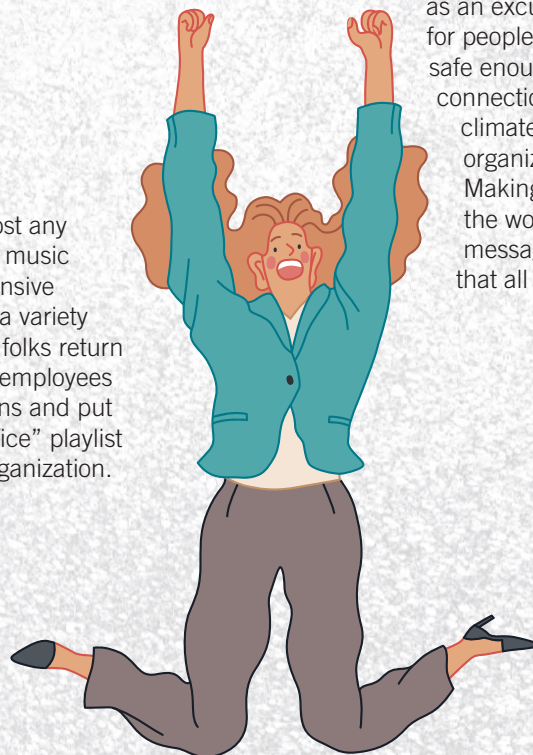
With a bit of planning and the implementation of three simple (and low cost) strategies, leaders can ease the transition back to in-office routines and leverage a rare opportunity to build greater unity.

GREET EMPLOYEES AT THE DOOR

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented actions: having leaders greet employees as they return to work on the first days back is an unusual gesture but one that seems an appropriate response to a once-in-a-lifetime event. Rather than treat these firsts as non-events, leaders can show their support by being at the door. Even when smiles remain hidden by masks, a friendly wave and a warm welcome will convey important (and free) messages of support and unity. Greeting employees by name is another excellent way to turn up the warmth, especially when interacting with newer employees who joined the organization during the work-from-home period and who may never have visited the physical office.

USE MUSIC TO BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER

Music can lift the mood and communicate excitement at almost any occasion. With smartphones and music apps offering easy access to extensive music libraries, leaders can play a variety of upbeat and inspiring songs as folks return to work. Another option is to ask employees in advance for musical suggestions and put those songs on a “back to the office” playlist shared with the entire team or organization.



Songs that focus on unity and togetherness are great additions here, such as “We Are the Champions” (Queen), “We Built This City” (Starship), “We Are Family” (Sister Sledge), or “I Won’t Let You Down” (OK Go).

MAKE IT SPECIAL

Treat the return to the office as if a family member were coming home after spending a year abroad: it's not just another day but a noteworthy event! Mark the occasion with decorations (such as welcome signs and balloons), special foods, or even gifts. None of these has to be expensive. Donuts in the morning, for example, or pizza for lunch would be a nice treat for everyone. Unexpected yet simple gifts such as pens or masks with the company logo can boost spirits and foster connection.

FOCUS ON UNITY

Helping employees reconnect with each other and reengage with purpose is a vital part of bringing everyone back into the office, and companies should seize this opportunity to promote a positive, supportive workplace. (Don't hide behind safety concerns as an excuse to do nothing. If it is safe enough for people to return to the workplace, it is safe enough to take these steps to foster connection.) Given the current employment climate, it's more important than ever for organizations to retain valuable employees. Making a special effort as they return to the workplace will send a loud and clear message that employees are valued and that all are welcome. ■

*Laura Kriska is the author of *The Business of WE* and a cross-cultural consultant specializing in “WE-building,” a process that narrows “us versus them” gaps in the workplace to decrease costs and complaints and to increase innovation, collaboration, and revenue. She can be reached at info@laurakriska.com.*



The Best Questions to Ask in Performance Reviews

BY ROB DE LUCA



Performance reviews usually include questions that are carefully designed to minimize subjectivity when analyzing responses and to provide actionable items for recognition and growth. Consider the four standard questions found in the self-assessment created by BambooHR, for example (which are typical of those found in other similar assessments):

- How well does my company recognize my value?
- What would have the greatest impact on my ability to do my best work more often?
- What are some things I do well?
- How could I improve?

Traditionally, performance reviews usually took the form of long, annual or semiannual sessions filled with lots of tough questions. They tended to fill employees (and managers) with anticipatory dread. And because they took place so infrequently, they weren't particularly effective tools for managing and improving performance. (Few people can remember what they had for lunch yesterday, much less what they were working on six months ago!)

Fortunately, more and more organizations are moving away from this archaic model. Administrators are increasingly understanding that reviews have a bigger impact when they're relevant to what's going on in employees' daily work. Making them easier and more frequent takes some of the weight off the experience, which allows employees and managers to communicate more openly.

Even though "short and sweet" assessments are becoming the norm, there are still times when administrators might want to add questions that cover

more than the general, broad topics listed above. Additional questions should be carefully worded to minimize subjective or vague replies. Gallup's list of the "12 needs managers can meet to improve employees' productivity," known as the Q12, is a good starting point for crafting questions that assess employees' needs and engagement:¹

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

One helpful strategy is to create questions that gauge whether one of the twelve engagement statements is true or false. To obtain more detail or a result that can be tracked over time (one that serves as a springboard

to improvements or recognition of future achievement, for example), administrators can ask for responses in the form of lists or open-ended comments.

Here are some questions to consider adding to an employee's self-assessment:

- What experience, project, or action are you most proud of since your last review?
- Which of our company values have you most supported in the last few months?
- How has your manager helped you achieve your goals?
- What do you enjoy most about the work you do?
- What corporate/personal goals did you accomplish? Which goals did you fall short of achieving?
- What skill or knowledge do people on your team or at the company rely on you to provide?
- What project or goal would you like to focus on in the next quarter (six months, year)?
- How were you able to contribute to the company's current goal of creating a more inclusive culture (closing more sales, launching a new marketing campaign, etc.)?
- What would colleagues or clients say about their recent interactions with you?

Here are some questions to consider adding to a manager's assessment of an employee:

- Describe a meaningful contribution that they have made since their last performance review.
- Which company value have you seen them most support in the last few months?
- How have you supported their ability to succeed and grow in their position?
- At what types of projects do they excel?
- How successful have they been at creating and meeting goals over the past few months?
- What role do they have on the team, and what is their impact there?
- What are some projects or focus areas that could benefit them?
- How have they contributed to the company's current goal of creating a more inclusive culture (closing more sales, launching a new marketing campaign, etc.)?
- What positive interactions have you seen them have with others?

Asking managers and employees similar questions makes it possible to compare responses and see whether they are aligned with each other and can shed further light on engagement, productivity, and long-term goals:

- Are you happy at this organization?
- What special projects have you worked on this past quarter/year?
- How can [name of manager or employee] help you?
- Would you recommend working here to your friends? Why or why not?
- How have you met corporate goals this quarter/year?
- How have you achieved your personal goals this quarter/year?
- What do you enjoy most about working with [name of manager or employee]?
- How do I show my focus on quality work? / How is [name of manager or employee]'s quality of work?
- How do I show my focus on clients? / How does [name of manager or employee] demonstrate a focus on client success?
- How do I show that I am solution-oriented and responsive in my role? / How does [name of manager or employee] demonstrate that they are solution-oriented and responsive?
- What do you hope to be doing within the company one year from now (and five years from now)?
- What do you want your next position to be at this company?
- To what recent project did you contribute significantly, and what were your contributions?
- How has [name of manager] helped you improve and do your best work during the past three months? / How have you encouraged and supported [name of employee] during the past three months?
- What do you need from [name of manager] to better support you in your role? / What do you need in order to better support [name of employee] in their role?
- What are your top three priorities for the next 6 to 12 months?
- What are your personal development goals (e.g., new skill, knowledge, work experience you'd like to acquire) to help you maximize your performance and potential?
- What training does [name of employee] need in order to improve?
- Do you feel comfortable taking risks and approaching [name of manager] with new ideas? Why or why not?
- What training do you wish you had?

Questions that go beyond merely asking “what have you accomplished?” (or “what has your employee accomplished?”) give respondents opportunities to describe their work experiences more fully. When respondents can share information about not only their accomplishments but also their needs, goals, and interests, their organizations will be better positioned to provide the support, training, career advancement, and other opportunities that foster the development of a more productive, more engaged, and happier workforce. ■

Rob de Luca is the copy director at BambooHR and has written extensively on culture and best practices in the HR field, combining original research and input from HR experts with his own perspective as a manager, creative executive, and veteran of diverse industries.

1. Gallup. Undated. Gallup website, www.gallup.com/workplace/356063/gallup-q12-employee-engagement-survey.aspx.

LEADING OUT

Imagine a situation in which someone worries that they would be less admired (or perhaps even shunned or literally booed!) for saying what they honestly think about a difficult situation their team is facing. Unfortunately, this scenario plays out far too often, with many people opting simply to agree with the rest of their team—and not explaining what other actions or decisions they would make—even when they think it's the wrong choice.

Being the lone voice of opposition on a team project can be a scary experience. For example, someone might be reluctant to speak out against how disrespectful their team members are being to one individual for fear of being similarly targeted. Or someone who has great ideas for how to improve a certain process might be unwilling to make themselves vulnerable and risk being ignored.

The oft-cited phrase “be yourself, because everyone else is taken” does nothing to encourage leaders to be authentic because it fails to address the fear that prevents people from being their authentic selves. What do leaders fear?

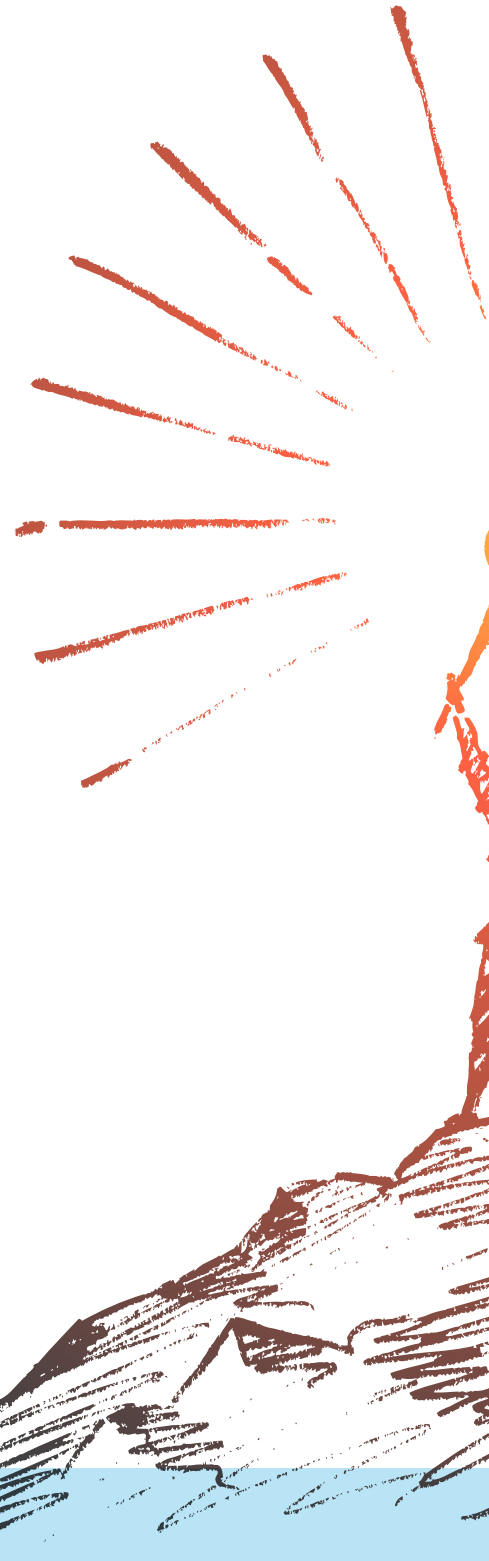
- Fear that their suggestions aren't good enough.
- Fear that they will be rejected by their colleagues.
- Fear that no one is listening.
- Fear that their solutions are the wrong ones.



Leaders should not be afraid to lead with their authentic selves. But what does that look like? What does it mean to be authentic?

The Authentic Self Is a Natural Compass

An authentic leader bases their decisions and actions on their core values and is therefore perceived by others as genuine. A leader who uses what is important to them to guide their behavior can never go wrong. For example, someone who believes that speaking up to share their perspective is more important than being popular with the team will never let themselves down by remaining silent. (And a leader who values everyone's time will always be punctual and respectful of not taking up more time than truly necessary.)



H E N T I C A L L Y

BY TERRI KLAAS



Strong Leaders Are Authentic Leaders

A leader who is seen by others as someone worth emulating is an authentic leader. Leaders who always demand to have things their way are not strong leaders but rather bullies. Strong leaders display their authentic selves by following through on their promises, listening to team members' suggestions, making honesty a core value, and being fully present.

Influential Leaders See Authenticity as Critical

Just as someone cannot be a leader without being influential, they cannot be influential without being authentic. Influential leaders are visionaries who can share their ideas in clear and exciting ways to enlist others' support for them. A title or position doesn't convey influence; rather, it emerges from an individual's authenticity, ability to galvanize others, and enthusiasm.

Authentic Leadership Is Contagious

When leaders are authentic, the people around them feel empowered to be authentic as well. Authentic leaders don't need to constantly question how they go about working with others or approaching difficult decisions. Because their authenticity allows them to be aligned with their values, they know why they are taking specific steps and feel confident in their actions and behavior. When leaders are authentic, team members joyfully join in and respect authenticity. Through the emergence of a culture of truth and vulnerability, strong relationship building and people-centered decisions lead to higher-performing teams. ■

Terri Klaas is a highly sought-after leadership skills facilitator, trainer, coach, and speaker who helps organizations develop influential leaders and retain their experienced talent. She can be reached at www.terriklassconsulting.com.

Why “Microleadership” Doesn’t Exist

BY BRIAN FORMATO



**The term MICROMANAGE—
“to manage especially
with excessive control or
attention to details”¹** —often

comes up in discussions about how to run organizations and manage employees. No one wants to be seen as a micromanager, but overly controlling management styles are, unfortunately, pretty commonplace. Interestingly, there’s no comparable term to describe similarly negative behaviors in leadership practices. Why?

The terms management and leadership are often used synonymously, and organizations frequently describe the same group of people as both a “management team” and a “leadership team.” But management and leadership are actually two very different things, with each area relying on its own particular skill set. The two are so different, in fact, that it’s rare to find people who excel at both.

The phrase “managers do things right; leaders do the right things” (which has been attributed separately to Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis, who were both significant contributors to management and leadership studies) highlights the different approaches of those two groups. Managers work with and through others to accomplish organizational goals, whereas leaders attempt to influence the behavior of other individuals or groups.

Management and leadership are further differentiated by the fact that management is assigned, whereas leadership is assumed. Management generally relies on permission and authority, which are bestowed through titles and the assignment of duties. However, it is possible



for someone at any level of an organization to become a leader by taking the initiative, going above and beyond the minimum, being a team player, modeling positive behavior, and inspiring others.

Management’s focus on command and control enables the existence of micromanagement. But because leadership focuses on influence, vision, and freedom, an extreme version of that approach—“microleadership”—simply can’t exist.

When companies do a better job of distinguishing between management and leadership, they can achieve better results in both areas. By identifying—and supporting—the different behaviors and expected outcomes of managers and leaders, organizations can empower each group to be more effective and successful in its own way. ■

Brian Formato is the founder of Groove Management, a leadership development and executive coaching firm; and the creator of LeaderSurf, an adventurous development program for business leaders of all backgrounds, industries, and corners of the world who want to break old habits and create lasting change. He can be reached at bformato@groovemanagement.com.

1. “Micromanage.” www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/micromanage

Why Is Talent Disappearing— and What Can Be Done to Stop It?

BY STEPHANIE H. NELSON AND STACEY WANNINGER

As companies attempt to rehire and recover from the last two years, they're all trying to comprehend why some of their talented employees are pursuing new opportunities that often don't appear to be better (in terms of pay or advancement possibilities) than their current roles. To better understand this shift, organizations need to examine their work cultures closely. What underlying cultural issues exist? How can they be resolved quickly? What has changed in the last two years? To find answers to these questions, leaders should begin by exploring certain key areas.

ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

Over the past two years, it has become clear that many jobs can be handled remotely. When the pandemic began, businesses had no choice but to change their practices in order to survive; many leaders who had adamantly insisted that employees needed to be in the office to be productive suddenly shifted to a new way of thinking. Two years later, as the world continues to navigate these uncertain times, more and more companies are demanding that their workers return to the office full time. At the same time, though, employees have become accustomed to working from home and having a better work-life balance (as well as saving money on transportation costs), and many are pushing back against calls to go back to the office. Leaders must now ask themselves if requiring employees to return to the office full time is necessary for success—and whether they are willing to insist on



that if it means risking the loss of valuable talent to other organizations that view work differently and don't have that same requirement.

TRUST

Leaders should not take their employees' trust for granted. It's important to survey employees and measure their trust in leadership periodically—and then adjust practices and policies as needed. Even when leaders feel that they have their employees' trust, they should never assume that employees think leadership has their best interests in mind when making decisions. Trust is never guaranteed and must be earned every day.

VALUE

Everyone wants to feel valued, and a company's failure to acknowledge someone's work appropriately can be a deciding factor in their decision to leave the organization. Therefore, it's vital that leaders and teammates appreciate each other and value each person's contribution to the company. But employees are all individuals who each have their own (and different) ideas about how they want to be recognized. Some prefer one-on-one praise, whereas others might want public acknowledgment of their achievements. Whatever forms recognition takes, it must be given sincerely (employees will be quick to spot insincerity) and consistently.

UNDERSTANDING

Although everyone might be in the same storm, they're not all in the same boat: each person has their own unique challenges and obstacles. Leaders should check in regularly with their employees to ensure that they are taking time off, balancing work and life appropriately, and not burning out. When trying to negotiate between making sure business needs are met while giving people the time off they need, leaders must consider how to handle situations in which several employees want to take time off simultaneously. Is it easier to cover for an employee for a day or a week while they take care of themselves, or preferable to fill the position if the employee leaves entirely? With employees across all industries more stressed and burned out than ever before, sometimes something as simple as encouraging an employee to take a vacation or at least a day or two off without guilt or repercussions can have a hugely positive impact on maintaining workers' motivation and productivity.

COMMUNICATION

Employees often cite lack of communication as a major source of their frustration. When leaders fail to send out organizational updates, share words of encouragement, offer feedback, or recognize team members' accomplishments, employees can start to think that no one cares about or notices their contributions, which can lead to feelings of isolation. In addition, when employees feel left out of the loop, they may worry that the company isn't doing well or that leadership is hiding valuable information. The adage "no news is good news" doesn't hold true anymore: employees expect and value communication, because it could inform their decisions to stay (or leave).

ALIGNMENT TO THE MISSION

Almost every organization has a mission statement. However, it's often buried (and unnoticed) in the employee handbook or completely forgotten when workloads increase. Employees often don't understand their companies' mission statements, and those who do and demonstrate commitment to them often aren't recognized for doing so. Having a clear mission statement—and communicating it regularly and prominently—can unite the organization and motivate employees to work together toward a common goal. Incorporating assessment of mission alignment in employee performance evaluations and recognition programs can further demonstrate the organization's commitment to the mission and its overall importance. When employees believe in the company's mission and overall goals, they are more likely to feel secure in their roles and stand with the organization.


LEADERSHIP

It's essential for leaders to engage in self-reflection about their own performance. Some key questions they should ask themselves include:

- Am I approachable?
- Am I kind and considerate to my employees?
- Do I consider the impact of my communications and actions?
- Am I a servant leader willing to help anyone?

Employees often take cues from their leaders and emulate their behavior. For example, if a leader sends out work e-mail on a

Sunday or while on vacation, their employees are likely to assume that they are expected to do the same (even though this expectation does not exist). Because leaders bear responsibility for how their actions affect their employees, they also bear responsibility for how their actions play a role in losing those employees.



Employees often cite lack of communication as a major source of their frustration.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Employees choose to leave their organizations for a variety of reasons, and it's impossible to predict all the factors that can influence such a decision. Even when a leader offers clear and effective communication, is flexible about employees' life situations, and recognizes their contributions an employee might still choose to leave.

By understanding the key reasons why an employee could look for different employment—and understanding their needs, values, and motivations—a leader can increase their chances of retaining valuable talent. ■

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LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS:

Empathy

BY VALERIE M. GRUBB

“Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.”

— Oprah Winfrey



Let’s start with a definition. Empathy is...

...the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

In general, being empathic boils down to building positive connections with others by seeing and understanding things from their point of view.

But being empathic as a leader involves even more because of workplace responsibilities and the power dynamics involved in leader–employee relationships. A leader’s actions can have a trickle-down effect throughout an entire organization—and that’s why it’s critical for leaders to actively cultivate this trait in themselves. In fact, by some counts it’s “the most important leadership skill” out there. No surprise, then, that it’s in high demand these days for leadership and management roles!

It is very important to note though that having empathy does not mean letting things slide! Too often, managers and people leaders wrongly think that if they show empathy, they are not holding their employees to task. That’s not the case at all.

In fact, by showing empathy, leaders can actually strengthen accountability.

Empathy is one route to giving employees the support and encouragement that can help them rise to their challenges and exceed your expectations (and their own!).

THE VALUE OF EMPATHY IN THE WORKPLACE

Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action. It’s the impetus for creating change.

— Max Carver

As an element of emotional intelligence, empathy plays an important role in building the positive interpersonal connections that are key to a healthy, productive work environment. Those improved relationships can yield multiple benefits to an organization.

For example, Microsoft found that by building trust and improving communication, “empathy leads to understanding and collaboration, which helps innovation push its way through the often-messy journey toward helpful products.” At Microsoft, an emphasis on empathy helped teams develop AI-based projects to help people with disabilities.

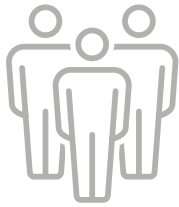
An empathic approach can also help organizations improve hiring and retention. One study found that

“senior leader empathy is linked to reduced intent to leave.” People want to feel like more than cogs in a machine, and to be valued as individuals who have feelings, triumphs, and challenges. They are especially responsive to leaders who prioritize and support work–life balance and “understand that their employees (like themselves) have both a duty at home and with family and all the pressures which come with that, as well as having to maintain their professional responsibilities.” Employees want to work for leaders (and with colleagues) who care. Unsurprisingly, companies whose leadership and HR policies are marked by an empathic approach very frequently rank highly on “best places to work” lists.

Empathy also can give leaders an edge over their competitors.

Looking at the market from the point of view of other companies can help leaders pinpoint their competitors’ strengths and weaknesses, as well as possibly anticipate their next moves—and outflank them.

Honestly, I can’t imagine a single reason why a leader wouldn’t want to foster empathy in the workplace. In short, “an empathic environment can increase understanding among coworkers, quality engagement and leadership efficacy, and can improve relationships with clients and stakeholders.”



HOW TO BE A MORE EMPATHIC LEADER

You can only understand people if you feel them in yourself.

— John Steinbeck

With effort, deliberateness, and persistence, anyone can become a more empathic person. You don't have to be born with "empathy genes" or go to "empathy school." You just need to commit to developing this skill in yourself and keep in mind some general guidelines.

Take your time. Connections with people don't develop overnight. As Carla Hasson, the global chief brand officer of Citi, points out, "It requires time to get to know who people are and it requires patience to take yourself outside of who you are and what you're comfortable with." You need to recognize that.

Show interest in other people. Ask your employees questions and listen attentively to their answers. Learn about their roles in the organization and about the work they do. And learn about their personal lives, too—hobbies, interests, families, goals, etc. (Just be sure not to pry inappropriately or fail to respect their boundaries.)

Be sincere. Don't just go through the motions. You can't build genuine connections with your employees if you're just pretending to care about them. You have to mean it.

Be willing to help employees with their problems. In addition to altruistic reasons for doing this, there are pragmatic reasons as well: one person's problems can affect their entire team or department, or even the entire organization. Helping employees resolve their problems (whether professional or personal) enables them to focus their attention and energy on their work and achieve better results.

Be compassionate. Pay attention to your employees' workloads. If someone seems like they're approaching burnout, take action to lighten their loads. And when employees are dealing with unexpected or new challenges (such as a life change or a personal loss), give them the support and space they need to manage them.

When I was with Oxygen Media, my employee's wife gave birth to twins. It was a wonderful moment although the ensuing weeks and even months were a nightmare for Anthony due to a severe lack of sleep. It was almost comical as he would come to work in the same clothes he had on the day before (and once, he came in with barf on his shirt and didn't even realize it!). He was an A player up to this point although his performance took a nosedive. Rather than punish him for it, I lightened the load so he could focus on one thing at a time. Once his babies were in a more regular sleep pattern, he was back up to stellar performance mode and his loyalty to me (and the company) for working with him during this challenging time was off the charts. Showing a little bit of empathy resulted in a great, loyal, long-term employee.

Be accessible. It's hard to build relationships with employees if they don't have opportunities to connect with you. Remember the power imbalance in the manager–employee relationship and try to be sensitive to your employees' perspectives. Do you make yourself readily available for meetings and one-on-one conversations? Why might someone be reluctant to approach you? In order to achieve the best communication possible, you want your employees to feel comfortable sharing with you.

Work at it. Empathy doesn't develop overnight. It's a skill that needs to be developed—and maintained. So practice it regularly, mindfully, and with an open mind and an open heart.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy.

— Meryl Streep

We've all struggled over the past year and a half. Employers' responses to the pandemic have highlighted companies' strengths (and deficiencies) in their ability to treat their employees empathically. Many organizations adopted more empathy-based practices to help their people manage the stress, radically altered working conditions (e.g., abruptly and unexpectedly shifting to remote work, having to juggle work with helping their children with remote learning), and general uncertainty and fear associated with the pandemic.

These efforts paid off: employees who had empathic leaders and managers felt "much more able to balance work obligations with family and personal obligations" during the pandemic. Although we don't yet know exactly what the post-pandemic business landscape will look like, I agree with one study that "employers' pandemic response has changed employee expectations," and I suspect we'll see the emphasis on empathy continue.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp relief the many benefits of empathic leadership. But it shouldn't take a global crisis to make people recognize the value of empathy.

As the saying goes, "The best leaders are those that lead by example." So it follows that if you want employees who care about and connect well with others, then you need to exhibit those behaviors yourself. Empathy can provide a solid foundation for a workplace environment that's more positive, more collaborative, more innovative—and more productive and more effective, too. ■

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IMPROVING THE WORKPLACE IN 2022

BY MACKENZIE FROESE

It's impossible to predict the future with 100 percent accuracy. But as we round the corner into 2022, we can certainly make some educated guesses, based on recent business trends, about what will be important this year.

First, there's the issue of work arrangements. When the pandemic started, most companies adopted remote or hybrid models as much as they were able to. Since COVID-19 vaccines became widely available last spring, though, many organizations have begun transitioning their people back to the office. As more companies ask (or require) employees to return to "business as usual" (and as many employees push back against that expectation), each organization needs to figure out how it wants to answer certain key staffing questions, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Will employees be in person, remote, or hybrid?
- Is the new policy mandatory or optional? (Will employees have any choices?)
- Does the policy apply to all employees or only to some groups? And if it's the latter, how will those groups be defined?

As you can see, there are many possible permutations here—which means companies will find it very difficult to please everyone. Obviously, each organization will have to figure out what works best for its employees and its business goals. Whatever choice is made, though, the guidelines need to be

defined and communicated clearly and carefully.

At the same time, companies will likely need to increase salaries and benefits in 2022. During the past few years, organizations have struggled to find and retain top talent. With the years-long "war for talent" colliding with the "great resignation" that began during the pandemic, companies will have to work harder than ever to get the people they need. In 2022, those efforts must include improving salaries and benefits if companies want to attract and keep good employees.

Lastly, companies will also need to meet employees' increasing expectations that companies make conscious efforts to address discrimination, prejudice, and inequality in the workplace. Nationwide headlines over the past couple of years have sparked conversations about disparities in the treatment of people based on their ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, class, and other identities. Amid this increasing awareness, many organizations are implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to examine these issues in their own workplaces. I don't expect that these initiatives will solve all problems in 2022, but I think they're a good start toward achieving workplaces that are friendly to all employees. ■

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RECIPE

LENTIL SOUP

When it's cold outside and you're looking for something comforting, healthy (especially if you're recovering from the excesses of the winter holiday season!), and easy to prepare, it's time for lentil soup. Not only does it warm you twice (both during its long simmer on the stove and when you eat it), this soup takes minimal effort, doesn't require you to run to the store for unusual ingredients, and leaves just one pot to clean up. What more could you ask for?

Yield: 6 servings

Time: 1 Hour

What you'll need:

- ▶ 1 ½ cups lentils
- ▶ 4 Tb olive oil
- ▶ 1 large red bell pepper, diced
- ▶ 1 large carrot, diced
- ▶ 1 large onion, diced
- ▶ 2 Tb chopped parsley
- ▶ 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ▶ 1 Tb mustard
- ▶ 2 Tb tomato paste
- ▶ 1 bay leaf
- ▶ 8 cups water
- ▶ Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- ▶ Soak the lentils in water while you work on everything else.
- ▶ Warm the olive oil in a large pot, then add the bell pepper, carrot, onion, and parsley. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- ▶ Stir in the garlic, mustard, and tomato paste and cook for 2 minutes.
- ▶ Add the drained lentils, bay leaf, and water. Bring to a boil, cover, then simmer for 40 minutes.
- ▶ Add salt (start with 1 ½ tsp) and pepper to taste.



Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories: 279cal

Fat: 9.7 g

Dietary fiber: 16.3 g

Sugars: 4.4 g

Protein: 13.4 g

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