

Saying Goodbye After Letting Go Of Good Employees



Organizations let employees go for many of reasons. Sometimes a role is no longer needed or an employee is no longer performing well and other times an organization needs to reorganize a team or department or cut costs to adjust to changes in the marketplace. Regardless of why it happens, the decision to let go of an employee is only one of several difficult decisions tied to letting employees go.

Once the decision has been set in motion there are a series of decisions that will follow including when and how to inform employees and what, if anything will be provide in terms of severance and outplacement. Amidst all of these necessary and important decisions one decision can be easily forgotten, the decision on how the organization and the employee will actually say goodbye.

Lack of Closure When Departing Employees Disappear

When an employee changes roles through promotion or leaves an organization to begin a new job, moves away or retires there is usually an opportunity for co-workers and the organization to celebrate the departing employee and offer wishes for future success. This provides a chance to address the change and loss, process feelings and arrive at a level of closure. Frequently, however, in the case of a layoff, downsizing, restructuring or redundancy there is little opportunity to properly process the situation and say a healthy goodbye.

In our society rituals and traditions are important elements of transition. When we deny people the opportunity to engage in an effective transition this may lead to negative consequences. When a job loss occurs people commonly experience feelings of loss, anxiety, fear and sometimes anger and denial, additionally the departing employee may feel a sense of betrayal and abandonment. These feelings can be exacerbated when an employee simply disappears.

These unresolved emotions can impact both the employees future and the way the

remaining employees feel about the organization, which can impact performance and engagement.

Saying Goodbye To Good Employees

When good employees are 'let go' it can be difficult to know how to acknowledge the situation. Throwing a 'sorry we had to let you go and now you are unemployed' going away part seems bad form in response to the sometimes devastating and surprising bad news of the loss of a job. Yet asking the employee to slink away in silence and having co-workers whisper about what happened and wonder if it is okay to reach out to the employee does not seem to be the right way to go either.

The decision about how to acknowledge a departing employee may be difficult but taking the time to consider your options and then consult with your employee if appropriate may be an important step in the transition. As an organization you need to consider the variables of the situation, the employee's relationship and history with the organization and co-workers before taking any actions.

6 Ways to Say Goodbye

1. **Good-bye Card** – A simple and common gesture that is often not offered when an employee is laid off. It may seem awkward to ask co-workers to sign a group card or send a personal card to a colleague who has been laid off, but a card is a simple and common tradition that acknowledges a person and signifies a transition.
2. **Good-bye Gift** – Another traditional gesture that demonstrates a transition and an acknowledgement of a person and the contributions made by the person. However, the gift should not be one that signifies the organization by including a logo or represent a traditional goodbye gift given to employees who go of their own volition. A gift that would have meaning to the employee or a gift card to a restaurant can accomplish the symbolism.
3. **Good-bye Video** – In some cases going around the workplace and asking colleagues to record a brief good-bye message can be another way to support a transition. Some co-workers may be comfortable recording an individual message while others may find it easier to be part of a group. Depending on the situation this message can be created and presented on the final day of the employee's employment or a few days after departure. In some cases a group SKYPE call a few days after the departure might be an appropriate option.
4. **CEO / Senior Leader Good-bye** – It is not uncommon for a CEO to want to stay out of the day-to-day staffing activities. Yet often what people want most is acknowledgement and recognition for their contributions and their loss. In some cases a brief message from the CEO/Senior Leader to a team or departing employee can go a long way in displaying empathy and demonstrate the value the organization places on people. This message include a phone call or brief video message if the Leader is not in the same location or a personal visit that only needs to last 5 minutes.
5. **A Farewell Tour** – Arrange for a departing employee to select an hour the day before or on the final day of employment to visit colleagues around the workplace and say good-bye. This is not the same as a formal going away event, it should remain low-key and informal but loosely organized. Some employees may prefer this low-key approach to a gathering.

Farewell Party – In some cases it will be appropriate to arrange a 'thank you and good luck' party for departing employees. This can be held during the final few days of employment or within a few days of the last day of employment. Generally it is advisable to hold this in a neutral location away from the workplace so the focus can be on the people and not on memories of the past.

Of course any activity that involves the presence of the departing employee should be done in consultation with the employee. By providing your employee with options you can demonstrate your consideration for the employees experience of the situation.

Layoffs, restructuring and downsizing happen as a normal course of employment and finding ways to help everyone through the transition benefit everyone. Unless an employee is being terminated for cause affording everyone the opportunity to say goodbye is not only an appropriate, thoughtful and kind gesture but a prudent way for an organization to demonstrate the value they place on people.