

The Trouble With Bumping: Finding Closure and Moving On



Regardless of the necessity letting employees 'go' is rarely easy. At times it can be necessary to re-deploy senior employees into new roles in the organization. These senior employees may be entitled to 'bump' another employee who has less seniority and who occupies a job/role that the senior employee would be qualified to assume.

Overview of "Bumping"

Redistributing employees to retain important skills and to cut costs may be vital to the health of the organization. When "bumping" occurs a senior employee may "bump" another employee with less seniority. This bumping may be into an equivalent level role with equivalent compensation or when there is no equivalent position the senior employee may 'bump' an employee from a junior with less compensation.

Generally when the 'bumping' occurs into a more junior role the employee is able to retain his/her current rate of pay, seniority and benefits including vacation entitlement. However, usually the rate of pay and other benefits are held or 'frozen' over time until the employee's compensation is reflective of the standard compensation for the new position. This is what can enable the organization to retain experienced and skilled employees but project a cost saving over time.

Psychology of 'Bumping'

When an employee is laid off or downsized it may be a difficult experience for the individual, team and organization but there is often closure once the employee leaves. When an employee is retained through bumping and correspondingly another employee is laid off there can be a lack of closure for everyone. Although the employee may be grateful that he/she has retained a job there can be residual feelings of guilt or resentment that another person lost a

job; loss associated with losing a preferred job; discomfort at joining a new team who may have liked the former employee and a loss of faith and trust in the organization despite still having a job. If not well managed overtime this can affect an entire team and then the organization.

When an employee bumps another employee it is useful to take steps to mitigate the negative impact of the change. However, there are steps you can implement to help smooth the transition.

Tips to Mitigate the Psychology of Loss during Re-distribution of Employees

- **Manage the Transition Out:** Once the decision to bump has been made move the current employee out of the role and department quickly. If the employee is being retained in another role in the organization make this transition as soon as possible. Do not announce the change publically until the details have been sorted out and then make the announcement and begin the transition within a day or two. If the employee is being retained try to avoid making a big deal by having an official celebration of the change. If the employee is not being retained within the organization it is advisable to move the employee out of their role as soon as possible, within 1 week if possible. It can be superior to allow the employee to be paid out and not come into work during the required period of notice. It is important to treat the employee well as it speaks to how the organization will be viewed other employees'. Do not allow the employee to disappear without an acknowledgement but keep in mind that the longer the employee is around the more confusion everyone may experience. Celebrate the departing employee as you would normally celebrate any employee who was leaving.
- **Manage the Transition In:** Whenever possible allow a period of 1 – 2 weeks before moving the new employee in. This can provide an opportunity for everyone to process the change, become used to the former employees absence and begin to value the extra set of hands when the new employee arrives. There is no need to hold a big welcome celebration, as a simple transition in can be best.
- **Make Changes To The Role:** When possible this can be a good time to make previously desired changes to the role. However, take care that these changes do not add unwanted tasks to other employee's responsibilities. If you change the role slightly you can create opportunities for the new person, who may not be up to speed initially, to carve out his/her own space in the team. While you may be unable to 'change' the role substantially small changes can help differentiate between the former and new employee
- **Support The New Person And New Possibilities:** Whenever you bring in a new employee you should lead with information about that person's strengths and ability to contribute to the success of the team. When the new employee arrives find an opportunity for him/her to jump into a project or task he/she can succeed and show his/her strengths.
- **Monitor the Transition:** In particular over the first 6-8 weeks work closely with the manager and employee to help manage relationships and support the work activities of the new employee. After the 'honeymoon' period, generally the 8-12 week period is a good time to reassess and reevaluate the role and functioning within the team. Approach the team from a very positive point of view that focuses on what is working and what changes the team would like to see overall.

Remember there are 3 stages to a transition; Endings, the Journey and the New Beginning. Being aware of and managing each stage of the transition process can allow closure and a positive new beginning.