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People Leave Managers, Not Companies

Have you ever heard the expression, “People don’t leave companies, they leave managers.”? This includes emotional detachment as well as physically walking out the workplace door to another position. If we examine engagement, employees are affected by their supervisory relationship in many ways including:



- Feeling valued
- Feeling supported
- Having opportunity for development
- Having room for creativity
- Building networks
- Providing input for decisions
- Open communication
- Work/life balance
- Clear expectations
- Clarity of vision
- Sense of priorities
- Realistic goals
- Healthy boundaries

In a recent performance management course, we had a number of new supervisors and managers with very different expectations. Some wanted to understand the FACE software used to handle the formalities of written evaluations. Some wanted a checklist for how to manage performance. Some wanted a game plan to handle tough conversations. There were at least twenty attendees with just as many different wants and needs for the course.

We answered the questions posed by the attendees, but we focused mostly on the importance of authentically caring about and supporting the development of your employees. The software and dates of formal evaluations are not as important as sincere ongoing conversations and support to help employees be their best. This is not a superficial exercise to get evaluations over with.

A truly supportive relationship between a supervisor and an employee includes:

- Honest feedback
 - Supervisor to employee
 - Employee to supervisor
 - Across workgroups
- Ongoing conversations
 - Debrief meetings, projects, presentations
 - What went well?
 - What could be improved?
 - Share best practices across workgroups, divisions, and departments.
 - Share lessons learned, without blame which requires trust and vulnerability.
 - Talk about challenges when they are a “blip on the screen” rather than waiting until escalation
 - Practice tough love – talk about the tough areas for improvement, as well as the positives
- Tailor the supervisory relationship according to the needs of the employee, as well as the supervisor
 - Get to know the wants/needs of the individual
 - Understand each other’s personality, strengths, and weaknesses

People can only build trust through real opportunities to express themselves, to be heard and understood. During differences of opinion, it must be safe for others to express themselves. If you say you have an open door, does your body language demonstrate an openness when someone approaches? Do you show consistency through actions and words? Do you show humility and admit mistakes? Only through authentic human responses does emotional contact with direct reports move in a positive direction, and produce real engagement.