

When an Employee Shows Signs of Departure

"Though you haven't left me yet, I know you're just as good as gone."
~ Dolly Parton

Recently, the Society for Human Resource Management partnered with the Harvard Business Review to conduct research identifying the kinds of behavioral changes that occur when an employee is considering leaving. In a November 2016 article, they outlined 13 signs that they discovered predict that an employee is likely to leave within the next 12 months.

Although exhibiting some of these signs does not necessarily mean that an employee will leave, the research indicated that an employee exhibiting a large number of these behaviors was more likely to quit than one exhibiting a smaller number.

So, what are the signs that indicate an employee might be on the verge of resigning? And what can you do about it?

1. Decrease in work productivity
2. Acting less like a team player than usual
3. More frequently doing the minimum amount of work
4. Less interested in pleasing their supervisor
5. Less willing than usual to commit to long-term projects or deadlines
6. A negative shift in attitude
7. Less effort and work motivation than usual
8. Less focus than usual on job-related matters
9. More frequent expressions of dissatisfaction with their job
10. More frequent expressions of dissatisfaction with their supervisor
11. More frequently leaving early from work
12. Loss of enthusiasm for the organization's mission
13. Less interest than usual in responding to customer needs

Looking back, you may recognize some of these behaviors in others and, perhaps, even yourself. When an employee who makes valuable contributions to the organization begins exhibiting some of these behaviors, this can be cause for legitimate concern. But there is no need to panic.

A tried and true technique for retaining employees is to conduct a "stay interview" and to follow through on the findings. A stay interview asks employees several open-ended questions like:

- What do you like most or least about working here?
- If you could change something about your job, what would that be?
- What would make your job more satisfying?
- How do you like to be recognized?
- Which of your talents are not being used?
- What would you like to learn here?
- What motivates (or demotivates) you?
- What can I do to best support you?
- What can I do more of or less of as your manager?
- What might tempt you to leave?

Engaging in a conversation about these issues and responding to concerns that were raised by developing a plan of action could help save the day.

Stay interviews can actually be used regardless of whether an employee is exhibiting these behaviors. It's a good practice to conduct them with all employees to ensure you are maintaining a healthy and productive work environment.

Is one of your employees making a New Year's resolution to move on? Is he or she exhibiting several of these behaviors? If so, there is still time for you to intervene. Taking the steps outlined above can help you save one or more valuable contributors and avoid the high costs of turnover. Make it your New Year's resolution to conduct a few stay interviews.