



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Friendships Matter

I can't overstate the positive impact friends have had on my life. They help me think through ways to handle problems, they empathize when I need it, and they impart joy and happiness whenever I'm in their company. They let me know I'm important to them by calling to check on me, sharing their joys and sadness, and making time for me. They are delighted when I succeed and caring when I don't. They listen and don't judge.

Friendships take time and attention. Early in my career, I was a consultant assigned to projects that took me out of town from Monday through Friday for many months. When I'd get home Friday evenings, I'd be exhausted and would spend the weekend paying bills, doing laundry, and enjoying much needed time with my husband. My friendships took a back seat since I couldn't find time to fit them in. Fortunately, my friends understood and didn't abandon me.

Some friends are important for a time but when one of you moves away maintaining the relationships can be hard. Others have a special place in your heart that time and distance won't ever dislodge. Take time to nurture those relationships and let your friends know how much they matter to you.

Sandy



Ask Sandy: The Great Resignation

In today's hot job market many of my clients are losing good talent and wondering what to do. Some are throwing money at their star employees but finding that money is only one of many things that matter to them. They may be seeking a more defined career path, and they want the organization to "make a bet" on them by promoting them into a senior position rather than bringing in an untested executive from the outside. They're no longer enthusiastic about "stretch" roles that some organizations offer, where they do the work of

the next level, and in six months to a year, if they're successful, they're promoted into that role. A stretch role, they say, is more like a donkey always "stretching" its neck to reach the carrot dangling from a stick in front of them: the next level is always just out of reach. When the competition is offering a job at the level they aspire to, what is their motivation to stay and prove themselves?

For some professionals, the lack of interest or caring by senior leaders makes it easy to leave. They don't feel connected or committed to the organization. Your star people may be self-motivated, but they still need to know they are valued. One of my clients spends an hour a month with each of her top talent. She reviews their accomplishments and identifies skills they need to develop to get to the next level. And she provides them visibility with more senior leaders. She shares with them where the organization is going and asks if they are getting the opportunities and learning they want. She advocates for them with other leaders when they seek other roles within the company. Her efforts may not prevent someone from leaving, but she considers that a short-term problem. In the long run, her reputation for developing employees provides a steady stream of talented people eager to join her team.

Younger employees present a different retention challenge. For them, the opportunity to explore a different industry is compelling. There's nothing unsatisfactory about their current job; they just want to see what else is out there. Giving them more money to stay won't scratch that itch. Their managers may feel betrayed because they hired these employees when they had little experience and spent significant time and money training and developing them. If this is a recurring pattern with your junior employees, you may want to re-think your training strategy. For example, rather than invest in a yearlong training program, you could deploy training in shorter, just-in-time bursts. That way the organization can realize the benefit of their learning before providing more training.

While employees may cite banal reasons in their exit interviews, research has shown that people don't leave bad organizations; they leave bad bosses. Think about how you treat your staff. Would you want to work for a boss like you? If not, rethink your leadership style, ask for feedback, and work to become a great boss. You may not be able to retain everyone, but you can make their choice harder to make.

Learning for Leaders: Recognize what motivates your top talent. Let them know about your plans for their future and provide timelines.

Coaches Corner: Help your clients assess the talent on their teams and ways to retain them.

If you have questions, you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



The Power of an Apology

In studying gender differences in communication, bestselling author and Georgetown University linguistics professor Deborah Tannen found that men's and women's views on apologies are poles apart. Women seemingly say "I'm sorry" at the drop of a hat, while men are more circumspect. For women, saying they're sorry is a way to express empathy and caring and may not be an apology at all. When Margaret says she has a cold and doesn't feel well, Ellen responds by saying, "I'm sorry." But Ellen had nothing to do with Margaret's cold. Ellen isn't apologizing; she's empathizing.

Tom forgot to update the calendar on the company website, preventing people from registering for training. As a result, two classes had to be cancelled due to low enrollment. When his boss called the oversight to his attention, Tom said, "I'll take care of it today." He acknowledged a lapse but didn't apologize. His female boss, irritated by what seemed to be insufficient ownership of his mistake, pressed Tom further: "Your mistake cost us over \$8,000. I need to know that I can count on you to keep your commitments."

Tom was already feeling badly about forgetting to update the calendar and got defensive. He pointed out that this was the first time he had missed a deadline and didn't deserve her harsh response. His boss felt like he wasn't accepting her feedback and left the conversation angry.

According to Tannen, women generally look for connection and see an apology as a way to show that the other person matters. Men generally look for hierarchy in relationships; having to apologize puts them in a "one-down" position on the hierarchy and undermines their self-esteem.

Regardless of your gender, taking the time to make an apology when needed and phrase it right can go a long way to building strong positive relationships.

What Not to Do

In apologizing, a quick "sorry" can sound like you are minimizing the offense and your part in it. Even worse is saying, "I'm sorry you feel that way" or "I'm sorry that happened."

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