Three Worst Mistakes You Can Make in Leading Change

Michael Flora, MBA, M.A.Ed, LCPC
Senior Operations and Management Consultant
michael.flora@mtmservices.org

For many organizations, avoiding turnover in time of change is not a priority. If their training costs are minimal, they can afford to treat their employees poorly. In our industry that relies on highly skilled employees we don’t have that luxury. To maintain the quality of our services and programs, we need to have an effective retention strategy in driving transformational change.

When devising a retention strategy, most managers focus on providing incentives. Unfortunately, very few remember to remove disincentives. If your organization is losing employees during change, then there are three things you need to stop doing right away. What are they?

**Forgetting to Formalize**
If your company isn't using standardized job descriptions in defining new roles and expectations, then this is something you'll want to address as soon as possible. Since your employees need to be able to visualize future tasks, forgetting to formalize is a good way to make them anxious. When employees don't know what to expect, they fear they won't be able to succeed. Having fixed responsibilities will give your employees peace of mind, and that means fewer headaches for you. In addition to providing certainty, formalization gives employees a sense that their job titles mean something. Even if they don't feel a task is beneath them, changing employees’ responsibilities bruises their egos. They resent it, and they will seek the earliest opportunity to even the score. In short, if you want to retain your employees, then don't expect them to do work they weren't hired to do.

**Ignoring Unity of Command**
One of the worst things a manager can do is to ignore unity of command. Closely related to formalization, unity of command provides structure by eliminating conflicting orders and allowing employees to focus on a single task. Requiring your employees to answer to two managers creates an impossible situation in which they must risk angering one to please the other. Whichever course they choose, they are bound to be reprimanded. This is not only unfair; it is a major cause of turnover. Given the high cost of training new employees, unity of command is a concept that few managers can afford to ignore.
Failing to Provide Realistic Job Previews

In the course driving change, organizations are often obliged to fill jobs for which there are few willing applicants. To get around this, some managers will take the low road and misrepresent these jobs to prospective employees. This is a bad idea because employees who find that their jobs include responsibilities that weren’t mentioned during the interview process aren’t likely to stay very long. Instead of filling a job over and over, you’ll want to find the right applicant in the first place. If it means paying someone a premium, then it is money well spent. Failing to provide realistic job previews that clearly define the key performance indicators (KPIs) and expectations will only increase the likelihood that employees will make long-term commitments.

There’s no such thing as a perfect manager. Anyone who has led a group of employees knows that managers are liable to err. Yet, while managers are expected to fail on occasion, some errors are costlier than others. Those that lead to turnover in times of change can be the most expensive of all. Luckily, there are a few things you can do as a manager to avoid the most egregious mistakes. The first is to use formalized job descriptions with fixed responsibilities. The second is to make sure that your employees receive their instructions from a single manager. Finally, define roles responsibilities and expectations of how the team member can be successful.

Remember that some team members will self-select out of the change process. As we become more accountable to each other across all systems and product lines in our operations there will be natural attrition. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We must focus on retaining the top performers and those that have the attitude and aptitude you will need to success. Good people will always be able to find a job. What can we do to retain them?

Staying profitable in times of transformational change is a struggle under the best of circumstances. Understanding why employees quit and how to retain them in times of change is the key to building a successful healthcare business.

About the Author: Michael Flora, MBA, M.A.Ed, LCPC is the Senior Operation’ and Management Consultant for MTM Services and a National Council Senior Consultant. Mr. Flora is the CEO of a multimillion dollar behavioral healthcare organization and its four subsidiaries, and a renowned consultant, speaker, and author. He has extensive experience in strategic planning, marketing, performance improvement, workforce development, leadership coaching and training, board governance, and healthcare mergers and acquisitions. He has been recognized as Behavioral Health Champion and his organization is a recipient of the SAMHSA Science and Service Award for prevention programs. He has over 25 years of clinical and administrative experience. Consult engagement scheduling and copies of his current featured book Co-Authored with other MTM Services experts Operationalizing Health Reform may be arranged through contacting marian.bradley@mtmservices.org.