

Rethinking When an Employee Says, “I Quit”

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These words can catch a manager off guard, even if they anticipated an employee might be looking for a new position. Resignations can cause managers to lose confidence in themselves, create stress given they'll need to backfill the role, and possibly fear of how it may impact your team. If the person leaving is an A-player, other managers may wonder what you did to lose such a valuable employee.

Once the resignation is submitted, managers usually take one of two actions; offer more money for the employee to stay or show them the way out as soon as possible. Offering money will have short-term benefits by keeping the employee, but ultimately the same problems will persist and the employee will probably leave within two years. Showing an employee the door may be the result of organizational policy, but can have an impact on remaining employees seeing their former co-worker quickly ushered out.

During my career, I've lost a handful of employees. They will say they found another opportunity, or they couldn't balance work & life outside the office and ask me to not take it personally. However, most often employees leave because of bad bosses or coworkers,

unchallenged by their work, poor corporate culture, or a combination of these and possibly others. Instead of reacting to the resignation, I've taken another approach by asking a simple question; How did I fail you?

How did I fail you? This can seem like a loaded question to ask an outgoing employee. Most employees won't be honest with you. A few will see it as an opportunity to bash coworkers, management, and maybe even you. I look at it as an opportunity to listen intently and objectively, take feedback constructively, and look for opportunities for improvement.

I recently had an employee resign. She was a good project management professional and has a bright career ahead. I gave her progressively harder assignments and she continually delivered. Her resignation caught me off guard. HR did their usual exit interview with little feedback. On her last day, I asked how I failed her so I could improve not only myself, but our team as well. After some hesitation, she opened up. Those 15 minutes helped pave the way for improvements in how we do training, more updates on what's happening in the greater organization, and giving "stretch" assignments for other project managers to lead initiatives in various lines of business. She also gave me insight on my management style and how to improve. This helpful feedback has increased the satisfaction of remaining employees.

Employee attrition is a reality is all companies and one every manager faces. By rethinking the way we handle the news, we can gather feedback that will help us, and our teams, be better.

About the Author



Jason Orloske

I am a seasoned project, program and portfolio manager with over 15 years' experience in the healthcare, retail, legal, and regulatory sectors. I believe that a successful project is more than just delivering on time, scope, budget and quality. It starts with a solid understanding of the requested project and ensuring it aligns with organizational goals and market needs. Through a governance process, I have worked with executive teams so only the right projects are approved, as well as agreement on priority. I have created a culture of success with project teams through well-defined processes, open communication with and among team members, and continual stakeholder engagement. I'm a clear communicator who can interact with executives and their teams about technology, business and financial topics.