

Reducing the Pain of Staff Resignations - By Ken Burgin

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Had someone quit unexpectedly? It's costly, especially if they hold a senior position.

A colleague found out her operations manager was planning to leave, when the news slipped out accidentally. She moved fast to cover the gap, and reflecting on it later, said: 'Part of the problem is that most staff don't know how to resign or handle these situations professionally.'

Sound familiar? No-one wants good staff leaving, ever, but if it's going to happen, let's make sure it's organised and there's plenty of notice. They're more likely to do it the right way if they know what you want.

Your pain-reduction planning includes:

Set out your expectations. It may be in the Staff Manual somewhere, but even better if it's also on the noticeboard. 'If you are planning to resign, permanent staff are expected to give 4 weeks notice. For casual or hourly staff, we request one week's notice, or longer if possible. We don't want to see you go, but if a change is happening, we will work with you to make it smooth and trouble-free for everyone involved.'

Regular reviews pick up issues well in advance. Whether it's a Performance Review or a regular 'how's it going' chat, open conversation with employees gives them the space for honesty and sharing their plans. When was the last time this happened?

Make it easy to quit properly. Huh? If they're going, nothing will stop them, so facilitate it with a Resignation Form (in the Downloads) that sets out expectations and covers all the bases eg return of uniform, final pay etc. You can still keep control of the process.

Be ready with References. Or is it just a Statement of Service that you offer? Many businesses now only offer a short statement of start and finish dates. Whatever you provide, make sure the policy is clearly stated.

Start talking about 'succession planning'. Jargon or not, every job needs someone else covering it, who can step in and handle it permanently or for the interim. There are also 'quitting seasons' eg return to college or university - mark your calendar well in advance. The calmest managers and owners have Plan B in place for every position. Your managers and supervisors can all be involved in the planning process - there will be some interesting conversations!

Ask the manager responsible for an explanation. Was the wrong type of person put into the position, making failure inevitable? Is the job too boring, too hard or too complex? Was the training rushed or inadequate? Is change needed to avoid a repetition?

Is something bad happening? I remember uncovering some nasty harrassment after two young men resigned 'because it's time to move on'. Neither ever gave the real reason, but suspicions were aroused and we eventually found the cause. In hindsight, I should have seen the signs much earlier - how good is your 'intelligence network' for issues like this?

If there's no respect for the business, think about why. If you have people resigning with one day (or one minute) notice, something's going wrong. How did it come to this? Who chose these people and who failed to pick up the signals. Their direct supervisors usually know if there's a change happening - why wasn't it communicated?

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