

Mentorship—Showing your employees you care

By Joe Michels, PhD, P.E., C.P.L.
Principal
Solomon Bruce Consulting LLC
Billings, Montana 59103
www.solomonbruce.com

A colleague called and suggested we have coffee together. When we met, he was excited to visit and tell me about his son's good fortune about finding a job in a large international organization after he had just graduated from a prestigious college. The son had done well in college, worked hard and earned excellent grades. However, now, 15 months into the workforce, he was disillusioned, discouraged and depressed. My colleague asked what he might be able to do to help his son.

The nexus of the disillusionment and disappointment of the son was the fact that his new position had a strong component of seasonality in it, meaning that some days they needed him, other days they did not. However, he was paid a full salary even if he was not called into work. My colleague opined that the son was excited about the company when he originally became employed, however, became disillusioned because he was not needed at work every day. When he was not needed, he was allowed to stay at home and just chill out. Now, many folks would think that "chilling out" is the ideal position, getting paid for just "chilling". However, working out at the gym every day, playing golf, video games, going out to eat and doing yard work becomes boring, especially for an individual that is 23 years old who possesses a strong work ethic and a high degree of motivation.

Psychological research has repeatedly shown, most individuals want to work, make a contribution and have a true feeling of self worth. In other words, to be valued, recognized and appreciated. When employees do not feel these traits from their employer, they become restless, bored, anxious and begin seeking other opportunities in organizations thought to be more "caring" of their employees.

My first suggestion was to have the son visit with his supervisor and explain his feelings. The son felt "scared" to do so, for the supervisors appeared to have the same feelings, the same attitude and did not "want to rock the boat" or "make waves". From the son's perspective, his vice president probably understood the situation, however, the son, being a new employee had 3 levels of management between him and the vice president. The son knew that going directly to the Vice President was probably not the "politically correct" action, especially in today's environment. After all, the son needed to maintain a job, even if the organizational culture was something different than he had originally envisioned.

What is your organizational culture? How do your employees feel about working at your company? You say that you know, but do you really know? I submit that if you have any employee churn, other than summer school workers, you may not know as much as you think that you do. The millennial generation of employees today, those employees aged 18-28, have grown up in a generation of "me" always. Although they appear to want to break the rules, another perspective is that their generation has grown up with a different set of rules than you and I did. Yes, different rules from what you and I did. Not necessarily bad or good, however, substantially different.

As a business owner, boss, supervisor, team leader, you must recognize and identify that if you employ anyone, especially millennial generation workers, you must be in constant communication and contact with them. This is true of all workers and employees; however, it is much more important with millennials than baby boomers, Generation X or Generation Y workers. All employees want to know how they are doing, how they fit into the "big picture" and how their contributions fit into the overall corporate environment. This is the crux of the reason that today's millennial employee is constantly asking, "why" and "how" questions. These "why" and "how" questions can become very frightening and disconcerting to many older supervisors, for it may appear to be intimidating and questioning of the supervisor's authority. However, that is normally not the case. The worker of today is motivated by different factors than you or I might be. While you and I might be strongly motivated by money, position and authority, many of today's workers desire and seek a very sensitive of a strong "work-life" balance. Employees are willing to work hard when at the office, however, when quitting time arrives, they are ready to quit, irrespective if they are needed to continue a project or finish a job today. This is a factor that as an owner, boss or supervisor that you need to clearly understand with new employees.

One of the ways in which to obviate these type challenges which may occur in requesting workers to work overtime, is to identify upon hiring that overtime may, in deed, be a fact of life for the new employee. You need to clearly explain why overtime is needed and how the new employee fits into the organization and the contributions he/she makes each and every day. For some employee candidates, they will elect not to continue the interview and leave, not wanting to work overtime. If that happens to

you, it is better to know it now, then to have to depend on someone later and end up with attendance/discipline challenges that you did not envision.

Strong employee communication is a must in today's cultural environment. It is absolutely imperative that as an owner, boss, supervisor that you constantly and continually communicate how the business is doing, how the employee is doing and how the employee's contribution fits into the larger overall operation. Constant communication is continual. Communication is the real key to good mentorship. Positive, encouragement as well as words of correction needs to be given to each and every employee all the time. Words of correction guide employees to "do the right things", right being defined as your organizational expectations and ideals.

My colleague's son—well, what happened? The son decided to make the best of the situation and "make lemons out of lemonade". He enrolled in an on-line Master of Business Administration distance education program from a prestigious university, decided to volunteer with some non-profit agencies that he had a passion about and continue to do the best job possible for as long as he worked for his company. After all, he had few choices. He could not quit, he needed a job and this was a good job, however, perhaps the cultural fit was not as ideal as he had expected. However, the ability to begin and complete a graduate degree from another prestigious university was something that became very attractive to him.

If you need help, call Solomon Bruce Consulting LLC at 406-672-6387. We can help you enhance your mentorship!