

Keep workers productive after their two weeks' notice

"I'm giving my two weeks' notice." For managers, that sentence is one of the most painful to hear, especially when the speaker is a longtime, valued employee.

Replacing that person may be hard. But here's a more urgent problem you could face: Short-timers may tune out long before they walk out. And the last thing your department needs is an employee who leaves the job mentally and coasts lazily through the final two weeks.

When employees sleepwalk through their final two weeks, it sets a bad tone for the rest of the work force. That's why it's important for supervisors to send the message that they expect continued high productivity right to the end.

Also, don't take for granted that longtime top performers will remain productive during their last days. Even accomplished employees may consider this final chapter as a deserved downtime as a reward for their years.

Here are five ways to get the most out of employees right up until the buzzer sounds:

1. **Create a transition plan immediately.** If you'll be hiring a replacement, draft a plan that divides up work among remaining staffers until that replacement can be hired. If you have an in-house successor lined up, craft a training and transition plan for that person. Both plans should include the status of unfinished work and deadlines for completing it. That helps employees realize that their contributions during the final two weeks are critical to meeting long-term deadlines.
2. **Meet with the employee.** Review the transition plan with the departing employee and explain your work expectations. If you have an in-house replacement, include that person in the meeting and discuss how to start the training and transition immediately. Ask the employee to be available for questions from the replacement (by phone) for a limited period after his or her exit. Say, "Helping to train your replacement will allow us to maintain productivity after you are gone."
3. **Explain the personal benefits of finishing strong.** Last impressions are sometimes the most important. Explain to the employee that working hard and helping in the transition allow the worker to leave on a good note, which will help when it comes time to give a reference.
4. **Increase overall leadership and responsibility.** Develop ways for employees to pass on their knowledge and skills before leaving. Ask them to assist co-workers with projects and answer any questions. Appeal to employees' pride by saying things like, "Your co-workers admire your knowledge and leadership, and they can benefit from it until you leave."
5. **Solicit insights on your department.** Employees will be more open to talk when they're on their way out. Benefit from the employee's experience by soliciting candid suggestions that can make your department and organization more efficient. Ask "What have you learned about your position that could make it more productive in the future?"