

Stop taking high performers for granted

An occasional “reboot” is healthy. The craft of leadership benefits from going back to the basics regularly, and communication is the best place to start—it’s the foundation upon which you build relationships, trust, and teamwork. Strong communication skills enable you to share visions and goals while listening to the needs and concerns of your team. It is worthy of practicing, adjusting, and improving daily.

Here are two simple tactics that will improve your staff engagement and slow the “quiet quitting” of your team.

1. Identify your high performers

Where to start? First, direct your efforts to the most important people on your team—your high performers. Next, draw a distribution curve and label the segments for each type of performance—low, average, and high. If you wish, write the names of your employees in the segments. Then, reflect on where you spend most of your time.

Recognize that it is human nature to focus on problems, which results in you investing much of your time in the low performers as you attempt to change behaviors and improve results. On the surface, this seems to be a good approach, but the flaw is that high performers feel left out and disconnected.

Try a test—ask your fellow leaders where they spend their time. They will most probably point to the low-performer quadrant and start naming names. Then, point to the high performers and ask why they don’t spend time with those people. The answer will be simple: “Them? They don’t need it.”

Simply put, leaders often spend less time with their high performers than in other areas of the workforce.

This lack of communication with high performers disrupts the workforce at several levels over time. However, when it works, leaders who intentionally communicate ensure that all team members—especially high performers—are working towards a common goal, which requires sharing clear expectations with all and providing ongoing feedback and direction.

2. Call to action

The second point is a call for action—intentionally communicating with your high performers. First, identify them, then build a reminder system to keep them in your “front of mind.” Talk to them, listen, and include them in important discussions.

Another issue hiding in the weeds of poor communication is poor motivation. Ask your high performers what their motivators are, and you will get an interesting list, including “challenge” and “recognition.” Infrequently will they say “cash.” Those motivators come from having a quality relationship with a leader they trust.

Do you see the dangerous disconnect? It is human nature for leaders to spend time communicating with the low performers while they leave the latter to fend for themselves. Yet, while disconnected, the high performers are more likely to accept another offer or a step in their career that is being ignored in their current position.

When team members feel heard, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and remain anchored to you in a churning workforce. On the other hand, a lack of clear communication can lead to misunderstandings, disengagement, and conflict, all of which can harm team morale and employee retention. These are crucial to sustainable leadership.

Intentional communication focused on high performers is a crucial skill that enables leaders to effectively convey their vision, direct their team's work and build positive relationships. It is the foundation upon which you will build a successful organization.