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OPINION

Employee Loyalty: What Makes Them Stay?




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With the right relationships and an effective coaching process, employees feel more connected to their manager and, more importantly, to their job. Building employee loyalty usually begins on the front lines. Call centers have an even bigger need to spend the time and money on developing frontline managers into employee

loyalty experts.

In call centers across America, companies measure employee attrition. They often seek to understand why employees are leaving. However, they probably should be measuring why employees are staying. Instead of studying the dissatisfaction, it might be better to look at the problem from a new direction -- to study what makes them happy -- what makes them loyal.

In past generations, employees often stayed with one company for their entire life. Today's average job tenure is under five years and declining. The typical worker entering the workforce today can expect to change jobs seven times over a working lifetime. The numbers are even grimmer for the call center  industry.

Leadership and Support

According to the Gallup Organization, the top three reasons people leave their job are:

1. Lack of faith in the leadership or vision of the company;

2. Concern with the way management is treating people; and
3. Lack of management support in areas of performance reviews and employee development.

The [research](#) shows that the single most important factor affecting an individual's performance and commitment to stay with an organization is the relationship they have with their immediate manager. People leave their manager far more than they leave a company. So what do good managers do to create the kind of environment that makes employees want to stay -- to create a personal loyalty factor?

George Barna, the founder of research firm The Barna Group, states in his book *Revolution* that the next generation expects a completely new experience at work. He breaks down the generations this way: Baby Boomers born 1946 to 1964, Baby Busters born from 1965 to 1983 and Mosaics born 1984 to 2002.

He confirms that Baby Boomers have a need to succeed and be the best. But the next generations -- and the ones that currently fill many of the call center and frontline customer service jobs in America -- are driven by the need to build relationships. "Busters and Mosaics place a much higher premium on genuine personal relationships than do their predecessors. As they wield their increasing influence ... we are becoming a society focused on personal authentication rather than excellence in performance."

If this is true, what should be done to help frontline managers and supervisors understand how to lead in this new environment? Managers need to know how to create effective relationships. Supervisors need tools to help them identify the "value" in the life of employees. They can then use this information to begin to build relationships.

Think back to jobs that you have left and ask yourself what were some of the deciding factors in leaving? Was the relationship with your direct [manager](#) a good one? Probably not. Now think about jobs where you've remained even when the work or the company may not have made for the best situation. The relationship with your direct manager probably was a factor. Consider giving this test to your frontline managers:

- List the first and last names of every person on your team. Now list the names of their spouse or significant other. Also list the names and ages of their children.
- List the most important event in the employee's professional life in the past six months (promotion, award, etc.).
- List the most important event in the employee's personal life (birth, child graduated, community service, death in family, etc.).

- What is the employee's passion in life -- what makes them happy -- what do they do on the weekends (skiing, Cub Scout leader, graphic design, music, etc.).

If they pass the test with flying colors, then they probably already subscribe to the concept of relational leadership. Once they have the basics of building a relationship and know their people, it is time to begin a consistent practice to provide coaching and feedback for employees. Many companies have allowed frontline managers to make coaching a negative process only. Coaching of employees should include a good balance of positive reinforcement, opportunities to improve and listening by the manager.


Staying Positive

Larry Brown has coached teams to an NBA Championship, an Olympic Gold Medal and a NCAA Championship. When he was still coaching in the college ranks, a student made his coaching style the subject of her Master's dissertation. As she studied his remarks to players, she found that he had a 5 to 1 ratio of positive remarks versus negative remarks. He is the type of coach that one would want coaching their child in little league and the type of manager one would want working in their call center. Arm your managers with tools that allow them to share positive feedback as well as negative feedback.

It can be as simple as teaching them an easy way to establish coaching concepts. Here is a simple concept to consider. Use the CalibrationCoaching concept of the YMCA. No, not the silly dance song from the 70s, but the simple acronym that outlines how to coach in almost any situation:

- **Your Thoughts** - open the conversation by listening to the employee's perspective on the issues.
- **My Thoughts** - share your perspective with the employee. Explain the details and how they can change their behavior.
- **Calibration** - discuss what needs to change -- choose no more three areas for focus.
- **Action** - define expectations and set a timeline for change.

The YMCA concept is a simple yet effective way to coach for improvement.

With the right relationships and an effective coaching process, employees feel more connected to their manager and, more importantly, to their job. Building employee loyalty 📦 usually begins on the front lines. Call centers have an even bigger need to spend the time and money on developing frontline managers into employee loyalty experts. It all begins with building relationships. 

Bob Furniss, president of [Touchpoint Associates](#), works with organizations that want to increase productivity and profits by bringing out the best in their people.

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