How to Manage Employee Turnover in Your Nonprofit

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

When you seek resources on how to manage employee turnover in your organization, you're likely to find resources for how to *stop* turnover. That makes sense—if employees leave your nonprofit frequently after short tenures, it can be a sign that something is wrong in the organization and needs investigation. But not all turnover is bad, even when a number of people choose to move on from your organization at once. That might be the moment in your nonprofit's life when a lot of employees' journeys diverge from the organization's. Still, anytime valued employees leave, it's hard for everyone. Here are some strategies for managing through periods of high turnover at your organization.

Gather your emotions around an employee departure before you announce it. If you try to deliver an upbeat message while you're still struggling to process the news, your body language will show your emotions, and your team will get anxious. But don't wait more than one business day to share the news, as the employee has likely told or is telling work friends that they plan to leave.

Celebrate the people who leave. Hold a staff gathering to honor the contributions of departing employees. Talk about how they made a difference for your nonprofit. Be specific. Laugh about inside jokes. This process helps employees find closure around colleagues' departures and conveys that it's normal for people to move on.

Document standard procedures and top priority tasks and assignments for each position on your team and keep them in a set location. This will help employees who unexpectedly have to cover someone else's duties for a period of time.

Be honest, without being overly gloomy OR gleeful about a staff departure. Give employees space to voice their feelings and concerns about employee departures, and don't negate their worries and perceptions. Never gloat about the departure of a troublesome team member. Focus on the future and how you and the organization plan to move forward.

Hold regular check-ins with employees. Keep the check-ins frequent, but make sure they aren't a heavy lift. The check-ins should center the employee. Managers should communicate priorities clearly and help employees decide what tasks can wait until later. Managers should ask a few open-ended questions:

- What are your priorities?
- How can I help?
- How are you feeling?

Provide helpful resources. When people get frustrated or anxious about employee departures, they're most likely to express those feelings to their manager. Make sure managers understand what support is available to employees for help with workload and stress—and how much leeway they have as managers to unload team responsibilities. Help managers brainstorm ways to respond to common worries that employees might express.

Be realistic about how much work you can do as a leader. You can cover some tasks or responsibilities for your team in the short term, but set limits to avoid burnout.

Seek candid feedback. Ask departing employees to take part in an exit interview. Ask a trusted team member—someone other than the employee's direct supervisor—to conduct the exit interview before the employee's last day. Take time to process what the employee shares about their experience. Ask your team how your organization can continue to become a better place to work. Seek ways to put suggestions into practice, and when you can't make changes based on your team's feedback, explain why.

Resources

- Exit Interviews – Infographic, NRMC
- Closing Time: Effective Exit Interviews,NRMC
- 5 Steps for Supporting Your Workforce When There Is High Turnover, ADP
- 5 Strategies for Leading Teams Amid High Turnover, Idealist
- How to Manage Morale When a Well-Liked Employee Leaves, Harvard Business Review