

# What to do when an Employee Quits

While you can create the best work culture in the country, there will be those who resign for newer pastures.

Don't take it personally. According to leading IT research and advisory company Gartner, approximately 18% of Australians are looking to leave their jobs at any given time. Nevertheless, it can be hard to not let emotions take over, which is why it's important to know exactly what to do when this type of news inevitably reaches your desk.

Here are 10 simple steps to follow:

## 1) Know the protocol

Understand your company's HR procedures for handling these situations before any quitting-related conversations. Some policies stipulate that the moment a person offers a resignation, the organisation cut their employee ID card in half, call security, and escort them out of the office. Most employees are required to work out a notice period to ensure there's enough time for a handover, training or hiring a replacement. You may need to notify HR and/or your immediate line manager. Whatever the case, ensure you're following your organisation's protocol.

## 2) Take a moment and don't emote

It can be quite emotional when a member of your team quits. The last thing you want to do is react impulsively and say something you might regret. You will leave the individual with a negative impression of you and the organisation.

Instead, try to pause and take a deep breath to calm your surprise or distress. Then say something like:

*"I'm surprised/disappointed that you are leaving, and I'd like to learn what's compelling you to leave. Could we schedule a follow-up meeting in a few days once I've had a chance to process this?"*

Deferring any announcement on the resignation will allow you time to collect your thoughts and, if you want to keep the person, consider how you might do so. Ask them to keep the news to themselves for a day or two.

## 3) Understand how you're feeling

Ensure you take a moment to understand how you're feeling. In addition to being surprised, you may feel:

- Frustrated,
- discouraged,
- hurt,
- deflated,
- betrayed,
- angry,
- miffed,
- irked,
- deeply disappointed or
- just plain sad.

It's when we're not conscious of these negative emotions that they can unexpectedly emerge from below the surface, triggering nonconstructive, reactionary comments or behaviours that you may later regret and ones that will only serve to reinforce the person's decision to leave.

## 4) Don't take it personally

It is hard not to take the news personally. While there is always room to grow as a manager, remember their departure is not a blanket statement about your personal worth, skills as

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a manager or how good you are as a person. Put your ego aside and rise above those harsh feelings you have of yourself. Just like how you can't be best friends with everyone, you can't be the perfect manager for everyone. Alternatively, they may be leaving for:

- A better opportunity,
- better compensation,
- personal reasons or
- all of the above.

### 5) Try to get feedback

While the employee could be leaving for any number of reasons, it's in your - and the organisation's - interest to know some of the reasons why. Arrange a meeting to talk about the resignation. This can be in a meeting room, or at a cafe for a more relaxing environment.

Open up by building some trust. This can be getting aligned on how you'll communicate their departure to the team.

Ask: *"Do you have a preference on how we share this news?"* and offer them the opportunity to help craft the email that will mark their departure.

Once you've come to an agreement, move the discussion along by saying something like: *"I want to better understand all the reasons that led to your departure. I'd appreciate your honest feedback, even if it's negative. Your honesty will help me improve my leadership and this team."*

It's important to reiterate that their feedback will not impact any future references and will remain confidential to the rest of the team. If you find they are not forthcoming, ask if they would be open to having this conversation after they settle into the new role.

### 6) Ask targeted questions

Most employees are usually wary about what they say and will often be over-complimentary. To entice more honest answers, ask targeted questions like:

- If we could go back in time, say six months, what could we have done to keep you?

- What were the best and worst parts of your role?
- What would you change about the role to make it better for the next person?
- What growth opportunities do you wish you had received?
- What was your experience of the team atmosphere? How can I increase a sense of belonging on the team?
- Do you know of anyone else who might be considering leaving?

While the conversation will guide your questions you may want to ask your own. If so, ensure that they are future-oriented rather than rooted in the past. This relieves the employee from the uncomfortable position of judge and grants them the position of helper.

### 7) Come back with a counteroffer... or don't

Whether or not to make a counteroffer comes down to:

- How critical this person is to you and the organisation,
- how much of a disruption their absence will cause and
- how long it will take to find a suitable replacement.

It may be that their reasoning for leaving is primarily down to remuneration or career progression. If you do want to proceed with a counter offer, it needs to match what the employee wants.

Be warned that it may feel hard to fully trust the person again. Furthermore, counteroffers are less effective than we think. According to some research, 50% of employees who accept one end up quitting a year later. A better strategy is to retain a relationship with the departing employee and check in with them a few weeks later. If they're unhappy in their new role, welcome them back with open arms (and perhaps a pay rise!) and re-recruit them then.

### 8) Reflect on what you've learned

You'll hopefully have a tonne of information, but before you mindlessly go about making all these

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'corrections', determine if the concerns you uncovered were unique to that person or are more widespread. If you are unsure, ask your team some of the questions you asked the departing employee in your one-on-one meetings. You may then have a clearer picture.

### 9) Make changes

You may have learned that some element of your leadership needs refining, that your team feel undervalued, or that they are craving opportunities for growth or new challenges. If this is the case, prioritise quick wins. For example, if your team are looking for more professional growth, you can easily schedule time to meet with each of them to understand their aspirations and align on some development opportunities. Just be sure to act on it.

### 10) Help them experience a positive transition

As we've already touched on, maintaining positive working relationships with departing employees can be important. Future poaching aside, as a former employee, they are still a brand ambassador for the company and may be a future customer, client, or referral source for business and other employees.

So, don't let the employee leave feeling undervalued. Show support and enthusiasm for their new opportunity. Ask them what they need to make their transition as smooth as possible. Organising a farewell gift and a card will also go down well.

While it can hurt, someone giving notice is a regular occurrence in today's labour market and not the end of the world. Sometimes, it can even be used as a positive push to learn and grow as a manager. Using these 10 strategies can help you respond in a constructive way that maintains the relationship and helps all parties move on in a positive way.

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