

Why do some managers make organizational exits painful?

My last post on "[Is Favoritism 'slow poisoning' your organization?](#)" elicited a few comments and I wish to draw your attention to one particular comment which highlighted a situation where an employee who was not a favorite of the manager did not receive so much as a graceful 'good bye' from the manager when she was leaving the organization.

I have myself come across many who have had an excruciating exit experience at some of the large and respected organizations in recent times. Today, most organizations in India have a three month 'notice period' for voluntary separation and I have heard horror stories of what the exiting employees have had to go through during their 'notice period'. Of course, there is an HR facilitated exit interview which in most cases is a formality, as most employees are scared of giving any feedback as it may adversely affect their 'Service Certificate', references or the 'payment of their dues'.

No, this post is not about the various issues associated with exit interviews It's about how an employee who is leaving the organization is treated by his/her manager, colleagues and by the organization at large! Whether it's a voluntary separation, a termination or a layoff, is the 'exit experience' humane and appropriate or is it discriminatory, humiliating and miserable?

In my opinion, most senior leaders and HR do not give cognizance to the fact that one of the most valuable opportunities to brand a strong employee value proposition is when an employee leaves the organization! The way in which an organization treats an employee who is leaving the organization is a definitive indicator of the organization's intrinsic culture and character.

Most senior leaders and HR do not give cognizance to the fact that one of the most valuable opportunities to brand a strong employee value proposition is when an employee leaves the organization! We may be doing great things to enhance our organization culture and 'show case' our employee value proposition, but if we continue to traumatize the exiting employees, all our efforts to create a great organization culture will come to a big naught! Managers who engage in 'petty' activities to make the exit experience miserable by becoming vindictive and nasty from a personal perspective should be identified and immediately taken to task by the organization.

Let's pause for a moment and try to understand why a manager tries to make life difficult for an employee who is leaving the organization. To me, the following are important –

1) The manager wants to set an example to the rest of his team members on how difficult he can make things for them if they decide to leave the organization. Do employees perceive this as a deterrent? Definitely not, say some of the exiting employees who have experienced a 'bad exit experience'. In fact, they feel that the manager's attempt to frustrate and intimidate an

employee who is leaving the organization brings down the manager's leadership image and probably hastens the need of the existing team members to 'leave' the manager by either changing the team or changing the organization!

2) The manager feels that an employee who is leaving does not care for him/ her or the team and therefore why should he care about the exiting employee? It's a paradox that till the time an employee has to leave, he/she is considered a valuable team member but as soon as the decision to leave is finalized, the employee is ostracized! In extreme cases, and I know of a few such cases, the employee is asked to stop work, his email is deactivated, his official phone and laptop seized and he is asked to sit away from his team members at an empty desk and endure an excruciating wait for his 'notice period' to come to an end. In some other cases, the employee had been asked to clear his desk immediately, surrender his badge and then unceremoniously marched out of the organization. All this of course, with the consent of the employee's manager and sometimes at his behest!

3) The manager perceives that when an employee is leaving his team, it probably highlights his managerial incompetence. A manager in an IT or ITES organization often has attrition as a major KRA in his goal sheet with the associated incentives involved. When employees leave, the manager's KRAs get negatively impacted and subsequently it may impact their incentives and career progression. Further, this may get discussed at various review meetings, specially if the employee who is leaving is a top talent! Thus, an immature manager directs his anger at the employee who is leaving and instead of handling the exit professionally, he builds up a personal agenda of ego and vengeance against the particular employee!

4) Finally, I have also come across managers who have always felt threatened by certain members of their team. However, due to organization norms and regulations, they have had to moderate their behavior and actions towards such employees. But as soon as anyone of them has to leave the organization, the manager unleashes all the pent up anger and frustration on the employee knowing very well that the employee has little chance of retaliation (due to fear of notice period extension, holding up the issue of relieving letter or not clearing dues, etc.) or redressal from either HR or senior management.

Further, the manager is only a part of the 'exit experience' equation. The employee who is leaving often notices his colleagues and subordinates avoiding him (sometimes on explicit instructions of the manager) suddenly. The clearance process becomes a nightmare as earlier colleagues suddenly stop answering emails and telephone calls and the exiting employee has to await hours, even days to get a simple 'tick in the box' to certify a ridiculous 'no dues certificate' from the departmental library from where he/ she had not borrowed a book for the last 5 years!

An employee who was leaving an organization after 12 years of service described the clearance process as the most 'humiliating and humbling' experience in her career!

Leaving an organization is usually an emotional experience, specially for an employee who has spent a few years working there. Usually, the employee wants to leave the organization on good terms and doesn't want to 'burn the bridges' because, like one exiting employee once told me, "the world eventually catches up with you. You can never be sure on whether you have to come back and start working for the same organization sometime in the future and inherit your earlier manager or colleagues".

Each time we suffer the pain of a lousy exit experience, we seethe with anger and frustration. We waste no time in 'bad mouthing' the organization to the first humans we have contact with and spread negative buzz widely within our social networks. *Yet, I personally think that the 'pleasure' or 'pain' of an exit process is largely dependent on the personality of the manager and that he is responsible at the end for portraying a larger organization culture though his personal behavior and actions!*

So how does an organization ensure that an employee does not undergo a humiliating and painful exit experience? How does it ensure that its exit policy is based on mature and professional behavior of both the manager and the exiting employee? How does it infuse empathy into the managers who handle the exit process? How does it ensure that exiting employees leave the organization with pleasant memories and become their greatest brand ambassadors? How does an organization ensure that an employee who is leaving today becomes a potential 'rehire'? How do we get the 'happiness and positivity' in an organization's exit process?

These are some questions I leave you with. If you are a senior manager in your organization or if you are in HR, I would request you to audit your exit process and procedures immediately. All it takes is a warm handshake and a friendly 'good bye' to ensure a lifelong association of an organization with an employee and I'm sure you'll agree that in the long run, it's worth it!

(We at People Performance Practitioners help audit and transform the exit process and procedures of organizations. We work with external vendors who help organizations enhance the exit experience of employees using relevant data through customized exit surveys).
