Leaders We Have a Problem! It is Teacher Retention...What Can We Do about It?

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the schoolwork environment and how to combat the major problem of teacher retention. Leaders within an organization have the important task of motivating their employees. Various organizations will spend extra money every year developing new programs to keep quality employees. Still, leaders are wondering why so many of their employees are leaving the organization. Employees receive monetary incentives, and the question remains, why do organizations have such a high turnover rate each year?
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Introduction

Money as a motivator does not work for everyone. (W. Kritsonis, personal communication, March 10, 2007) says there are two characteristics about people and money. The two characteristics are: (1) People always feel entitled to more money and (2) Regardless of what pay, satisfaction is short lived. If companies want to do something about employee retention, then it is time to shift the focus to another tactic. According to the Nobscot Corporation, employee retention has become a key focus for human resource professionals (Kimball and Nink, 2006). Organizations and schools have come to the conclusion that hundreds of thousands of dollars can be saved annually by reducing employee turnover (Kimball and Nink, 2006). This is extremely important in an organization such as the school system. A school system with roughly 10,000 teachers and an estimated turnover rate of 20% would start to save nearly $500,000.00 per year by reducing turnover by just one percentage point" (Kimball and Nink, 2006, p. 66). Not only would reducing teacher turnover provide monetary savings, but it would also contribute to saving our children's educational future. Some would say that motivation would reduce staff turnover rate, which is the approach I would like to focus on. According to Kritsonis (W. Kritsonis, personal communication, March 10, 2007)), effective motivation is a matter of non-financial awards.

Purpose of this Article

The purpose of this article is to study the role of leadership as it relates to human resource management. With the shift to No Child Left Behind, it is critical that schools hire and retain high quality teachers for the sake of our children. Many districts have put in a great deal of effort and money in recruitment strategies and preparation programs in an endeavor to hire quality teachers. However, not enough is being done to retain these teachers.

Effective Recruitment Initiatives and Alternative Certification Programs

For many school districts, hiring practices, effective recruitment initiatives for minorities, and alternative certification programs have improved. With so many new programs and dollars spent, the question remains, why is teacher turn-over at a high rate? Why are so many high-quality teachers leaving the profession and developing negative attitudes toward teaching? Literature states there are two influential factors that can guide teachers' perspective of teaching. The two factors are school culture and school leadership. School culture has the ability to shape teacher professional practices, attitudes, and beliefs toward teaching. School leadership plays an important role during this development.

Effective Leaders Have Vision

An effective leader is one who has a vision, a plan for making the vision a reality, and possesses the ability to communicate the vision effectively. An effective leader is someone who influences the behaviors of others by creating a positive working environment. Leadership has the power to influence and steer school culture in a positive path. Administrators can build a sense of community in the workplace or not. Leadership can be normative, govern by strict rules, and bureaucratic tactics with a hierarchical form of organization. Leadership can be laissez-faire, a lack of organization, and no evidence of shared goals, values, vision and lack support. Instead, leadership can be effective, strong, goal-oriented, flexible, and encouraging when it comes to interacting with the staff.

If school leaders want to reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession, then they need to practice being effective in a collaborative culture. If not, more and more teachers, especially the top-notch teachers, will become discouraged and more likely to develop negative attitudes toward the profession.

Employee Retention Practices

There are many employee retention practices but no one has developed one from sound theory. Personally, I think a well-developed employee retention program should focus on two areas. The first area would be the correct motivational training of administrators. The second area would be to train administrators about exit interviews. I will look at training administrators first. Instead of focusing on what the employees should do differently, it would be interesting to see how a strategy as simple as leaders learning motivational techniques may affect employee retention.

It would be wonderful to see districts develop and implement a program teaching administrators how to motivate employees. Not all administrators know how to motivate others. The administrator is a critical piece in how a school manages and keeps quality employees. When there are problems within an organizational setting, the first thing most leaders do is look for ways to change the employees. School systems spend countless dollars on training and materials to change the employee's attitudes and values. These are the hard things to change, and most of the time, not the real root of the problem. The first thing to do when employees under perform is look at myself to see what I can do or change to make things better. I would recommend other administrators do the same. This may be difficult for some leaders, but it is easier to change yourself than to change everyone else. As a leader, it is your job to find out the

reasons your employees are not motivated. If the school systems focused on training the leaders in motivational and problem-solving strategies there would be a lot less turnover in the schools.

Several Motivational Theories

In modern organizations, the first motivational tool used by most leaders is the monetary incentive. Incentive pay can be used to influence employee behavior, but according to Katzell & Thompson, (1990) "it is certain that any benefits gained in the short-term will be more than lost in the long-term." "It is people's nature to look at what you are doing for them today. What you did for them in the past is quickly forgotten." (Katzell & Thompson, 1990, p. 150) That may not be the way it should be, but that is the way it is. With some people, incentives may trigger a short-term burst of output, but the next time you require that type of work, the reward will no longer be looked at as an "incentive", but as something they are expecting. With this being said, motivation of employees should go far beyond monetary incentives in order to be effective.

One may ask, "What is work motivation?" Through the years, various scholars have offered numerous definitions of motivation nearly all of which focus on the notion of enhancing and sustaining effort toward some desired goal-directed behavior. Kreitner (1995) defines motivation as the psychological process that gives behavior purpose and direction. Another definition is a predisposition to behave in a purposive manner to achieve specific, unmet needs (Buford, Bedeian, & Linder, 1995). Higgins (1994) states that motivation is an internal drive to satisfy an unsatisfied need. Place these in an organizational environment and an effective definition of work motivation emerges (Steers & Porter, 1991), the inner force that drives individuals to accomplish personal and organizational goals. According to Linder, (1998) the Hawthorne studies, conducted by Elton Mayo from 1924 to 1932 found that, employees are not motivated solely by money and employee behavior is linked to their attitudes.

There are several motivational theories out there. The question remains, which of these theories should organizations focus on? Four of the main theories are; the need theory, equity theory, expectancy theory, and job design model theory. The need theory highlights on internal reasons that energize behaviors and how environmental factors influence those reasons. According to the *Journal of Extension*, Maslow says employees have five levels of need. Those needs are physiological, safety, social, ego, and self-actualizing (Linder, 1998). In this theory, Maslow believes that lower level needs had to be satisfied before the next higher need would motivate employees (Linder, 1998). The equity theory recognizes that individual motivation comes from the rewards they receive compared to what others receive. Equity is achieved when the ratio of employee outcomes over inputs is equal to other employee outcomes over inputs (Adams, 1965).

The expectancy says the way people act in ways that produce wanted or expected outcomes is a motivator. According to the *Journal of Extension*, Vroom's theory is based on the belief that employee effort will lead to performance and performance will lead to rewards. "Rewards may be either positive or negative, the more positive the rewards the more likely the employee will be highly motivated. Conversely, the more negative the reward the less likely the employee will be motivated (Vroom, 1964)." Finally, the job design motivational theory is based on the idea that the task or job is a motivator itself. This theory is based on the work of Herzberg. "Herzberg's work categorized motivation into two factors: motivators and hygienes (Linder, 1998)." Motivator or intrinsic factors, such as achievement and recognition, produce

job satisfaction. Hygiene or extrinsic factors, such as pay and job security, produce job dissatisfaction (Linder, 1998).

Effective Leadership and Expectancy Theory

A well-rounded training program for administrators will show the administrators what they should do to get the desire productivity from their employees. If based on the expectancy theory and the job design theory, that program would clearly define the elements of work motivation. In an article examining the relationship between effective leadership and expectancy theory, Isaac, Zerbe, and Pitts (2001) asserted to heighten the effort-performance link, leaders must:
1) Provide challenging work that is valued.
2) Consider the ability of the follower.
3) Recognize the variances in follower self-esteem and self-concept.
4) Articulate clear goals and performance outcomes, and understand the correlation between individual followers and job satisfaction.
(Isaac, Zerbe, and Pitts, 2001)

They also stressed three follower beliefs that strengthen the performance-outcome link:

1) The follower must have trust and believe that the leader will deliver a salient reward.
2) The follower must receive equitable, predictable treatment.
3) The leader must give clear, honest feedback.
(Isaac, Zerbe, and Pitts, 2001)

Finally, Isaac et al. (2001) stated three issues that must be addressed with reference to the valence of outcomes:

1) Leaders must understand the attractiveness of outcomes will vary with individual differences.
2) Leaders must align the goals of followers with those of the organization.
3) Leaders must understand that follower' needs can change as they go throughout life.
(Isaac, Zerbe, and Pitts, 2001)

According to Lord & Brown (2001), leaders are involved in two distinct responsibilities within the motivational progression. First, leaders are called upon to energize followers to exert effort toward individual goals that will accomplish organizational aims. Goal setting is an important leadership responsibility because effective goals can be motivating (Winters & Latham, 1996). A review of 11 meta-analyses and six narrative reviews of goal-setting research suggest that goal setting does increase individual, group, and work unit performance. Early goal-setting research provided strong support for the belief that specific and challenging goals are associated with higher levels of performance, more so than either no goals or general "do your best goals" (Mento, Steel, and Karren 1987). In contrast, that body of research also suggested

that narrow goals and multiple or potentially conflicting goals might decrease performance. More recently, Locke and Latham (1990) have proposed an integrated model of work motivation and satisfaction in which challenging and specific goals lead to high performance, which, in turn, leads to increased rewards, greater satisfaction, and ultimately, a stronger commitment to the organization. Also important is the leader's responsibility for the leader/follower relationship. Einstein (1995) recognized this dual nature and offered a diagnostic model that depicts leadership along a continuum from "responsible for" to "responsible to" leader behaviors. The central idea is that transformational leaders begin the leader/follower relationship with a sense of "responsibility for "goal success and individual growth but their objective is to evolve the relationship, when appropriate, to an interdependent relationship when leader and follower are "responsible to" to each other (Einstein & Humphreys, 2001). In a recent article, Humphrey's and Einstein stated that "enhancing follower motivation is a leadership responsibility that entails leader communication, feedback, and behaviors that are congruent to an individual follower's information and engagement preference based upon temperament (Einstein & Humphreys, 2001)."

As a leader and an Assistant Principal, La'SHonte Williams has come up with several rules that would be beneficial if included in a motivational training program for administrators. The first one is to treat your employees as adults and not children. Work rules are important. As a society, rules are important to protect the safety, comfort and serenity of individuals from each other. These rules should be adult rules. Physical and verbal abuse should never be used because they affect the safety and comfort of others. Whatever the rules are, they should be clear, fair, and uniformly administered. They should be documented in the employee handbook. Second, administrators should give their employees instructions and not orders. Many people believe that to be a good leader you have to give orders to the people below you. That is not the case. When you give an order, you do not allow the other person any room to think about what to do or how to do it. You do not allow the person the opportunity to figure out the best way to do the task. This, in turn, will hinder them from learning.

Leadership Opportunities in the School Environment – Five Tips for Success

We suggest that leaders should only give orders when it is necessary. All other times, you should give clear instructions. Sometimes you may have to do some monitoring and guiding, but coaching instead of orders will lessen the likelihood of employees developing hard feelings or hatred toward the leaders. Third, get your staff involved and encourage responsibility and leadership opportunities within the school environment. This is the whole idea behind the concept of a transformational leader. Seek to promote social interaction and teamwork between employees. Another important thing leaders need to do is listen to their employees and show them that their opinions, concerns, and thoughts are valid to you as a leader. The lines of communication must be open always and leaders should be reachable to their employees. Leaders should encourage innovation within the work environment and develop goals and challenges for all employees. Leaders should show appreciation and provide encouragement as needed. Leaders should also tolerate learning errors by giving honest feedback without using harsh criticism. It may sound cliché, but constructive criticism is the best criticism, mainly because it does not tap into the recipient's emotional side. According to an article in an issue of *Industrial Engineer*, Managers should foster creativity within their work environment. We

would have to agree with the use of this tactic when used for motivating others. "By creating an environment in your company that fosters creativity, you can encourage employees to react and adapt as conditions change (Cortello, 2005, p.26)." Cortello says there are five tips to identify roadblocks to creativity and cultivate an innovative work environment. The Five tips are as followed:

1.   Employees are often skeptical that there is a true commitment from management for real and meaningful change. Requests for innovation can be perceived as rhetoric if management does not demonstrate such commitment.

2.   Develop an environment that is conducive to innovative thinking and working in environment with the same demands and routines results in predictable outcomes. Change the physical environment to liven up things visually, and set employee expectations in terms of desired results while allowing flexibility and individuality. Micromanagers beware! Think about how your organization envisioned its programs compared to what they have become. Chances are the programs are more detailed and constrictive than intended. A good system evolves by adding necessary procedures and removing unnecessarily prescriptive procedures.

3   Employees must be convinced that innovative ideas will be given valid consideration. Nothing is more disheartening to an employee than to have an idea dismissed without proper evaluation.   Create a procedure for evaluating suggestions and ideas, and be sure that more than one person reviews suggestions. If ideas must work upstream through the traditional chain of command, then any manager in the chain who is adverse to change can shelve the idea. You never know which discarded idea had the potential to shape the firm.

4.   When the inevitable occurs and innovative ideas sometimes fail, employees must not feel as though their innovative spirit will be frowned upon. If the blame game is part of your corporate culture, then efforts to innovate are destined for failure. Ideas come forward in an atmosphere where the value of innovation exceeds the real or perceived consequences of entrepreneurial failure.

5.   Give your employees, either through their own initiative or under your guidance, dedicated time to focus on innovative ideas. Inspiration is often considered a mystical gift that strikes like lightening. In truth, it has more practical reality. Be it through corporate retreats, brainstorming meetings, or simply giving employees the flexibility to walk away from their desks for a few minutes each day, allow dedicated time for them to invoke their creative powers.

(Cortello, Craig, 2005, pg.26)

The above tips were designed to promote creativity within the corporate work environment, but could easily be modified to fit the educational work environment. The main idea is that "a leader's job is to create an environment that will allow great ideas to come forward

and then get out-of-the-way (Cortello, Craig, 2005)". Developing and promoting an environment of creativity should not be the last resort, but an operational necessity within a work environment.

Even though we know a little bit about motivational tactics now, one may still ask, "What reason should schools use motivational tactics other than for teacher retention?" The answer to me is quite simple. Another important reason districts should focus on motivation practices is student achievement. When employees feel motivated, they have a sense of commitment. When there is commitment, students will benefit in a positive way. One article tries to explain several motivational theories and how they serve as a tactic to increasing staff performance. It is like the domino-effect theory. Motivation increases commitment, commitment affects performance, and performance affects achievement. When staff performance increases so, will student performance.

School Improvement Lessens the Rate of Teacher Turnover

Now that we have examined the importance of correctly training the administrators of a school environment to lessen the rate of teacher turnover, We will examine the concept of "Exit Interviews" and how they may be helpful in this situation. Exit interviews should be used in conjunction with motivational tactics to combat teacher retention. When teachers leave, knowing the true reasons for their departure could help administrators fix problems they were not aware. Knowing could also help administrators make the necessary changes needed to help the remaining staff members and future staff members more comfortable. The main problem with this concept is that administrators may not know the proper way to carry it out. According to the Nobscot Corporation, "Exit interviews are one of the best ways to get true and honest feedback from employees. The downside is that it takes time to build up a significant amount of data." (Kimball and Nink, 2006) Increasing the participation rate can help an administrator get greater amounts of usable information faster.

Let Employees Know Honest Feedback Will Not Result in Punishment

Research shows the average response rate for paper and pencil exit interviews is roughly 30-35%. That means that a district with 2000 employees and 15% turnover rate would expect to receive about 100 completed exit interviews per year. At this participation level, the organization is getting exit feedback from just 5% of the total employee population (Kimball and Nink, 2006). If districts expanded their capabilities to paper and pencil, a web-based online system, and a telephone system, the response rate would increase significantly. If administrators want employees to take part in an exit interview, they should present the interview in a way that appeals to the exiting employee. Administrators should make sure the interview is not too long. According to (Kimball and Nink, 2006), if you are using a survey with rated questions, 35-60 questions is about the right survey length. If there are more than 60 questions, you need to do some cutting because the questions beyond 60 will start to feel long and uncomfortable. Administrators should make sure the questions are not confusing or personally invasive. We would suggest the questions be checked for simplicity. Kimball and Nink say, you should avoid using questions that focus on the employee's feelings and emotions. Always make it aware to the employee that the feedback they give will not be read or will make a difference. When you do make improvements based on suggestions from exit interviews, it is okay to tell employees the

suggestion came from exit interview feedback. This will let your employees know that you do actually listen to their suggestions. Letting employees know that honest feedback will not result in punishments will also put them at ease. If administrators use these suggestions to modify their exit interview process, it would definitely increase the rate of honest participation and would in turn, give useful feedback to combat the teacher retention problem.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the main goal of improving the teacher turnover rate is to improve the quality of education for our children. Training administrators in both motivational tactics and exit interviewing will help districts reach this goal. If school districts want to do something about employee retention, then it is time to shift the focus to another tactic. Remember, money as a motivator does not work for everyone.

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