

Why You Should Break Up With Your “Go-To” Employee

By Dr. Rob Bogosian May 3, 2016 TLNT



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If you've ever been a manager, chances are, you had your go-to resources. These are the most reliable associates on your team. The go-to resource always gets the job done – exactly as you want it done or as you would do it. You don't have to ask for a status update, you don't have to fret over the result. Thank God for the go-to resources. However, there is one thing you should do for the go-to resource: break up with them.

As the song goes, “breaking up is hard to do,” because, in this case, we grow dependent on the go-to employee. So why break up with them?

First, go-to employees may enjoy a higher status among their peers and receive more meaningful work opportunities, but they may also resent that they bear the burden of extra work while their perceived less reliable colleagues get a free ride.

This resentment is known as workplace justice.

The 'do-not-go-to' people

Workplace justice occurs when employees evaluate decisions and processes for fairness. When employees determine that processes and decisions are unjust, they can easily figure out how to even the score. This is not necessarily insidious, but rather, it is one way employees cope with workplace dynamics around uneven workload distribution.

When leaders establish their go-to resources, they inadvertently establish "do-not-go-to" resources. This distinction can easily form two factions: those in a cycle of advantage and those in a cycle of disadvantage or, in the vernacular, the haves and the have-nots.

Leaders create a Cycle of Advantage when the go-to resource produces positive results, which shapes the leader's positive impression. This encourages the leader to provide more opportunities to that resource, and if he or she produces more positive results, this begets more opportunity – and thus we have a Cycle of Advantage.

Conversely, leaders create a Cycle of Disadvantage when a resource produces an undesirable result, which shapes the leader's unfavorable impression. Consequently, the leader then restricts further opportunity for this resource. Therein lies the creation of two factions: the go-to employees and the do-not-go-to employees.

Turnover scripts

As a result, the do-not-go-to employees can grow resentful that their colleagues seem to get all the plum projects and assume that the leader plays favorites. The go-to employees can resent the do-not-go-to employees because they end up with an unfair share of the workload. Fairness and [justice assessments](#) are a key driver of voluntary turnover. When employees judge decisions as unfair, they are more inclined to start an internal dialog about employment options called "scripts."

Turnover scripts lead to employees quitting. If your go-to people leave, this disrupts your operational effectiveness. So, how can HR create a fair workplace where opportunity is availed to all and not just the go-to employees? To answer this question, we have to explore the relationships leaders have with the go-to and do-not-go-to employees.

What HR can do

First, managers should write the names of all their employees on paper. Next, they should circle and highlight the names of the employees who would say that they've received meaningful opportunities (to learn and grow in their current job) within the last two to three months. Then, have the managers answer these questions:

- How would you describe your relationship with those whose names you have circled?
- How would you describe your relationship with those whose names are NOT circled?
- Is it possible that the circled names are those who work most like you? Think most like you? Act most like you?
- Is it possible that those names not circled are least like you? Think unlike you? Act unlike you?

Research suggests that dissimilarity perceptions can drive a manager's evaluation of employee performance. When leaders act on these perceptions, manager and employee interactions tend to be more negative and can result in mistreatment in the form of exclusion.

Leaders must use their influence to challenge assumptions about dissimilarity that result in more fair treatment of those who may, on the surface, seem incompatible. Every employee is different, especially in learning styles. One employee may understand a task inherently when another may not. It may be a matter of three different variables: the process, the employee or the employee-manager relationship. Chances are there are other variables in play, such as preconceived notions and dissimilarity dynamics that can affect an employee's performance.

Ask yourself what you can do to move an employee from do-not-go-to status to go-to status. It's worth a try. If you can help one additional employee achieve go-to status, you can make a big difference in workplace productivity, overall perception of fairness and workplace engagement.

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