

10 Ways To Lose Great Staff Members

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In our work as search consultants at Vanderbloemen Search Group, much of the focus of our job is identifying people who have the potential to be great long-term team members for our clients. Hiring great people is a great first step, but it's just the beginning. Once you have a great team member who is producing excellent work and serving effectively, the next – and more important – challenge will be retaining them for the long haul.

In interviews, we always ask our candidates to talk about why they are leaving their current position or why they left a previous job. In many cases, their reasons for leaving are simply about readiness to take on a new and expanded role or a sense of calling to a new ministry. These are the good stories!

However, sometimes we hear about toxic staff environments, unhealthy leadership cultures, and lack of intentionality in support and development of the team and individual that have led a highly gifted leader to look for healthier place to serve. The stories are remarkably consistent and instructive.

So if you want to lose a great staff member, here are some ways to do it:

1. Don't give them a voice in strategic direction.

Talented people don't need to have the final say on the direction of ministry, but they do need to be heard and have their ideas taken seriously. If you want to lose a great staff member, marginalize their opportunity to speak into your vision and direction.

2. Don't give them freedom to fail boldly.

Great leaders aren't afraid to attempt something bold to reach people for Jesus. Bold actions will sometimes fail, and the best leaders will learn more from that failure than they would have if they never tried. If your team members are afraid of failing because your culture doesn't allow for it, they won't take the risks necessary to accomplish a big vision.

3. Don't create a safe place to talk about difficult things.

The best teams embrace healthy conflict and provide a safe place to disagree and debate ministry initiatives or even relational conflicts. Healthy conflict can take place behind closed doors, not dissolve into personal attacks, and remain confidential. Once conflict gets resolved, the team agrees to support the decision or resolution as one. If you want to lose a team member, take the conflict public or don't allow anyone to disagree with you.

4. Micromanage them.

The best teams are filled with people who know what is expected of them in terms of results and goals and are given freedom to accomplish those goals without having someone checking up on them or looking over their shoulders. Having to account for every moment of time, or explain every ministry decision will suck the life out of talented people.

5. Talk about them behind their back.

Nothing will kill a team faster than hearing that their pastor, supervisor, or elder board is talking about staff members behind their backs. I'm not talking about the normal, healthy evaluations that take place as part of the process of building a ministry, but the unhealthy gossip or criticism of a team member to other staff or congregation members. If there is an issue that needs to be addressed, do it immediately and face to face, with a plan to resolve the situation or concern in a healthy, God-honoring, and productive way.

6. Don't have their back when someone criticizes them.

Because the church is filled with fallen and often hurting people, it is inevitable that one of your team members will be criticized for something they said, did, or failed to do. Sometimes those critiques are valid and sometimes they are not, but if you want to lose them, don't support them. Agree with the critics. Don't address the issue. The leaders who

retain talented staff will acknowledge the criticism, support the team member, and then address it privately in a constructive way.

7. Don't give constructive feedback.

If you want to lose a great staff member, don't tell them where they are underperforming. Don't help them get better or identify areas of weakness. Your best team members will actually welcome your feedback. They want to get better, address weaknesses, and avoid blind spots, and they need your help to become the leader God has called them to be.

8. Don't invest in their development as leaders and as people.

Every one of us is a work in progress both personally and professionally, but ministry can be relentless and draining. It can be challenging to find the time, money, and resources to help a good team member become great. If you want to lose a valuable member of your team, don't send them to a conference for professional development. Don't help them pay for professional counseling or coaching. Don't send them away for a private retreat where they can be alone with God.

9. Don't compensate them appropriately.

Gifted and called people do not go into ministry to get rich. But neither do they necessarily expect to have every month be a struggle to make ends meet. Some of your most valuable staff members can be woefully underpaid. And often, pay raises do not keep up with the cost of living or the needs of a growing family. Be sure that you are researching compensation for your staff, you take into consideration the community where you are located, the cost of living, and the strategic role that staff member plays in your ministry.

10. Assume they know they are valued.

If you want a great staff member to leave your team, don't affirm them regularly and specifically. Just assume they know how much you appreciate them and value their ministry contributions. Or when you do tell them they are doing a great job, don't be



specific. Your best team members will, of course, be self-motivated and will not be needy of affirmation all the time, but everyone needs to know that they are making a difference for the kingdom.

Creating a healthy and supportive staff culture takes a whole lot of effort, discernment, grace, and love, but retaining those gifted team members is 100% worth it. Make sure you are making your ministry staff members feel appreciated, investing in their God-given gifts, and providing them with a safe place and strong voice.

For more insights on helping you build and maximize your church staff, visit our blog at www.vanderbloemen.com/insights.