

The Long View

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For almost three decades, Kaye has designed management and career development programs for many organizations. She wrote and co-wrote *Up is Not the Only Way* and *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em*. As an author, consultant, and speaker, she encourages both managers and employees to increase talent retention in their organizations.

What can organizations do to encourage their employees to stay?

HR and learning executives need to take retention and engagement seriously. They need to examine both their A players and B players, and then ask, “Who is critical?, Who might leave?, and What will the impact of their leaving be on the organization?”

I recommend that organizations hold “stay interviews” in addition to exit interviews. Typically we ask, “What can we do to keep you?” when the person’s other foot is already out the door—and then it’s too late.

I think most managers agree that talent retention, development, and engagement are important issues. They have the will but not the skill. We owe it to managers to teach them those skills and provide the tools they need to tackle these vital issues.

Some organizations arrogantly say, “People will always want to come and work here.” What they forget is that people may join an organization for its mission, brand, or reputation, but they leave if they have no relationship with their manager. HR executives need to demand accountability from their managers for keeping talent not just on their team but in the enterprise.

What role do employees play in improving retention?

I believe employees are the missing link in engagement and retention. Many employees feel very entitled; they think that their organizations or managers will manage their careers for them and then complain when things don’t happen.

In engagement, the employee has a role, the manager has a role, and the organization has a role. I call it the “Three S” model, where the organization has to deliver on the structure and system, managers have to deliver on the support, and the individual has to have the spark. There are four kinds of job equity that individuals build up in organizations: financial, influential, social, and skill equity. Before jumping ship, they should look at all they have in their current jobs in terms of these equities.

Employees can be either opportunity whiners or miners. They have to be proactive about managing their own work satisfaction and going after the things they want.

Have you applied your expertise into managing your own career?

I’m a great believer in peer support and group learning. When I speak at a conference, I always stay to attend someone else’s session. There are a number of professional and

personal groups that I've belonged to for many years. I couldn't do what I do without that support.

The more I learn from others, the more I bring to my own work. We should all ask ourselves, "What have you learned?" and "Who have you taught?" I don't think we do that enough. We don't stop to consider what we learned from an experience. We're too busy rushing to the next thing.

I have a very large library, and I read many, many books. I'm always struck by how little I know. I still believe there's a lot of newness in this field and opportunities to learn from our mistakes. For the past 30 years I have grown a company, and there have certainly been many mistakes to learn from.

What was your first job, and what lesson did you take away from it?

Thirty years ago, I was the student personnel dean at Brandeis University. I learned to stand up for what I believe, voice my opinion even when it's different from others, and rely on my intuition.

There were many brilliant students who thought that great academics and a high IQ were all they needed to succeed. They discovered that being an A student and going to an elite school wasn't enough, and that in fact what they needed was political and social savvy as well as the ability to bounce back from disappointments. I learned that there's much more to career or life success than just your smarts alone.

What do you do to relax outside work?

Actually, finding more hobbies is very high on my "to do" list. I've loved building my company and watching others step up to the plate. As an entrepreneur, however, it's not always easy to know when enough is enough. I love my work—most of the time—but never get totally away from it.

My dad is 93 and my mom is 90, and watching them in this part of their lives certainly teaches me to take advantage of every moment while I still can. I do work hard to make time for exercise. I swim and ski. However, in terms of having a second passion—that's something I'm still working on.