



Is the Grass Greener in Your Office?

By Laurel Gregory

One out of five employees in the United States voluntarily leaves his or her job each year, according to a 2013 Gallup report. Did you lose anyone this past year? And what did it cost you?

Replacement costs can vary widely from 6 to 213 percent of the annual salary (Boushely and Glynn, 2012). From lost revenue, advertising costs, research, and interview time, to increased workplace stress, it is hard to nail an actual dollar amount on the cost, but rest assured it is costly and painful. There may be many reasons that employees leave.

I recently heard a practice owner say that employees leave because they THINK the grass is greener elsewhere. What if it is? Have you taken a look at your grass lately?

After compiling survey results on employee engagement activities world-wide, Changeboard, a global human resources community, reported that,

For many employees, whether they seek to move on or not comes down to how engaged they are with their job

and their employer as a whole. This will mean different things to different people, but a common yardstick is just how far they will go, and how much extra discretionary effort they will put in, to help their organization perform. For employers, this is critical to success, not just in holding onto talented individuals but ensuring high levels of productivity that will

filter through to the bottom line or the share price.

What employees want from their jobs, their workplace, and their bosses does indeed matter in employee retention and engagement. In a 2013 survey of 120,000 respondents from 31 countries conducted by Kelly Services, a global leader in workforce solutions, 63 percent of respondents say that their direct managers have a significant impact on the level of their satisfaction and engagement (Kelly OCG, 2013).

Skafof Consulting conducted a survey of over 150 employees at 18 private practices in the hearing health-care field, and it became clear that there are five essential nutrients that increase employee happiness and job satisfaction. The answers are not surprising and serve as a good reminder. After meeting the employee's basic need for fair pay, employees were looking to their leadership for stewardship, great teamwork, a healthy environment, the ability to grow, and meaning. What we refer to as "STEAM."

The first of these nutrients for your greener grass, stewardship, will be explored in this article.

Stewardship

Stewardship of your employees begins with building a solid relationship with your team. You do this with your family, your spouse, and your kids. This same principle applies to your team. Helena Solodar of Audiological Consultants of Atlanta, Georgia, put it succinctly, "It's like having another child." And with raising any child, a solid, loving relationship needs to exist for your child to grow and succeed.

Leadership guru Zig Ziglar (2010) embraces the necessity to love your employees. Certainly not what we typically associate with good

business practices. Ziglar contends that it is the foundation in leading a team and growing your success. Following close behind is showing you care. According to Ziglar, it is these two elements that will make good businesses great.

So how do you love and care for your employees? It begins with you showing a personal interest. You might say, "I know all about my people." Do you? Do you know their hopes and dreams? Do you know their struggles and their disappointments?

Ask yourself these questions and give yourself an honest rating between 0–10 (0=Not at All, 10=Perfect). Make a list of all of your employees and write a paragraph or bullet points on what you know and DO that justifies your rating for each employee.

- Do I know what my employees are passionate about and what they value for themselves in their careers?
- Do I know what motivates each of my employees?
- Do I appreciate and give recognition to my employees?
- Do I show compassion and kindness to my employees?
- Do I make my employees feel valued?
- Do my employees trust me?

At the Academy's recent Practice Management Specialty Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, conference attendees brainstormed on how to nurture this stewardship value. The following are some of the broad categories and ideas that were discussed and can be implemented:

Recognition and Demonstrating Interest

- Survey your employees on their job satisfaction and engagement.
- Conduct a 360° feedback of your leadership skills.
- Review personal and professional goals and track them.
- Recognize good customer service.
- Inquire about important personal events.
- Give "shout-outs" when an employee gets a compliment from a patient (to share with group).
- Ask patients to send in postcards of positive comments and display these in the office.
- Spend time at weekly meetings sharing "personal life" info outside of work.
- Provide coffee and donuts at team meetings.

Communication

- Give "in-the-moment" feedback on good jobs.
- Provide constructive criticism.
- Say "thank you" to employees every day—let it be the last thing they hear when they leave at night!
- Surprise them with gifts and thank you notes.
- Listen to suggestions and delegate to get them done.
- Engage them in company decisions.

Extras

- Give bonus for entire office, if the quarterly goals are met.
- Provide employee incentives with bonuses.
- Give random gift cards—like after a really hard day or even a spectacular day (individually).

Special Events

- Conduct team-building activities for off-site fun.
- Have employee appreciation events—surprise them: scavenger hunt, SPA day, winery, messages, pot-lucks, concert tickets, happy hour, wine and canvas, crab fest.
- Acknowledge special days.
- Buy lunch for office on birthdays.
- Give paid day off for birthday.
- Purchase birthday cakes.
- Have holiday parties/lunches.
- Have a lunch day—in or out-of-office—but make it worthwhile (i.e., when in-house, make sure there is time to eat together!).
- Hold a company picnic with games.
- Close early on random Fridays as a surprise.

- Create a staff day once a year.
- Make it known that their families are important and that you understand emergencies.
- Organize group events—baseball games, family baseball.

Practical Steps to Achieve Greener Grass

Steps for Success

- Interview/survey your employees. Measure where you are with your staff. This will help direct which of the five areas need your attention. (Gallup Employee Engagement Survey, Skafold Consulting Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey).
- Explore with each employee what is important to him or her with respect to daily work and career. Develop a professional goal. An activity that I like to use is one where I have the employee finish the sentence, “when my work is ideal, I am ...” Have employees come up with 10 statements and then whittle that down to their top five. Use this to guide you in developing a professional goal that works for them and works for you. (Gregory, 2014).
- Devise a longterm employee management plan. Take into account your interviews and surveys. Note the things to continue

that are working and add actions to address the things that need improvement.

- Learn where you can improve your leadership of your group. This might include conducting a 360° review (We review our employees, how about our employees reviewing us?). If you have never done this, it can be very eye-opening. (Profiles International Checkpoint 360, Skafold Consulting Everything DiSC 363® For Leaders).

These are just a few concrete ideas that can be implemented in your office today. It should also be the starting point in developing an employee management plan for your office as part of your strategic planning. Creating loyal employees, who stay with you for the long haul, begins with you being loyal to them—and this starts with being great stewards. Growing greener grass is a process which takes time and attention. By adding the essential nutrients, you will ensure that yours is vibrant, lush, and inviting, and can withstand the elements for the long haul.

If you are looking to increase your employee engagement, attend the AudiologyNOW! session “Is The Grass Greener In Your Office?” and learn more about stewardship and the other four key nutrients of what employees desire. 🌱

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

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