THE EXPERTS

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Insights on the Sophomore Slump and More

The Workplace Sophomore Slump

Being in the staffing and recruiting industry for two decades, I see this all the time: New hires in their first year are aggressive, motivated and going 100 mph. Then year two comes along, and it isn't fresh anymore. As a result employees become less engaged, leading to a dip in productivity and confidence.

Managers must step in and help. Here's how:

• **Address it.** The first thing is having that tough conversation. If you notice that an employee is in a slump, talk to him or her about it and share specific examples.

• **Change things up.** Add variety to the workday. You'd be surprised what can re-engage somebody. It could be changing where the employee sits or putting him or her on a project with different people.

• **Connect them with others.** That could involve a mentorship or simply asking another person who has gone through something similar to take the employee to coffee or lunch and share how they overcame their slump.

• **Create a plan.** Work with the employee to create a step-by-step process of what he or she can do to improve. This plan could include workshops to attend, books to read or people—internally or in the industry—to speak with. Then, hold the employee accountable to doing each step and meet weekly to discuss progress.

• **Praise them.** If an employee was working hard in year one and had no praise or acknowledgment, that could be one reason for the dip in year two. It is crucial that managers celebrate the small wins publicly. It will help the employee regain confidence and stay positive.

• **Go back to the basics.** If there was a process that the employee steered away from that used to produce results, go back to it.

—*Tom Gimbel, founder and CEO, LaSalle Network, a national staffing and recruiting firm*

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Time to Rethink Those Job Postings

Hiring is one of a small-business owner's biggest challenges. As the unemployment rate shrinks, small-business owners are concerned about losing talent to large corporations. Studies indicate, however, that for millennials in particular, corporate culture ranks high when deciding where to apply. And the most expedient way for a small business to showcase its unique culture is through its job postings.

Small-business owners can provide a narrative that resonates with their ideal hire by using some or all of the following strategies to write a compelling job description:

• **Lose the stock photos on your careers page.** Images of your own people doing their jobs and interacting with their colleagues are authentic; stock images aren't.

• **Promote your mission.** Candidates identify with the employer brand through its mission, and a succinct mission statement tells potential employees if your values align with theirs.

• **Invite applicants to your adventure.** You'll attract your target audience if you entice them to be part of something bigger than themselves.

• **Lose the laundry list of requirements.** Envision the person you want to see in this role. Focus on character traits when you describe your ideal hire. Rather than, "the ideal candidate will possess superior skills in JavaScript," how about "writing elegant code fascinates you."

• **Ditch the Applicant Tracking System software.** I've led human resources for two small businesses and never needed it to manage the volume of resumes. Let HR do its job by screening resumes with human eyes. You may even want to provide the hiring manager's email. It restores and elevates recruiting to the human exchange it needs to be.

—*Lynda Spiegel, founder, Rising Star Resumes*

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Don't Mistake Perks for Culture

Too often, companies confuse perks and culture. Leaders think that to create a great culture, they should go purchase Ping-Pong and pool tables, get a keg for the office, or offer four-day workweeks.

But these are all perks, not culture, which are two very different things. If a company only focuses on adding flashy perks, they may attract an employee, but they won't retain them.

Don't get me wrong, perks are great. But if there are beanbag chairs and no one likes each other, that doesn't accomplish much. Allowing your employees to bring dogs to work is a perk. Texting an employee after they had to put their dog down is culture.

Culture is made up of emotion and experiences. It is the intangible feelings created by tangible actions. It is about caring for your people and creating a sense of community that allows employees to feel connected to something bigger than their individual role. It is allowing them to feel comfortable to be themselves. Culture is creating an experience that employees wouldn't otherwise be able to have. It is spending the time to listen and to support them in their personal lives. It is about asking for their opinion and then acting on the feedback.

Culture is transparency, and that is a two-way-street. If leaders expect their staff to be transparent, they too have to be transparent. They share their mistakes that have cost money, damaged confidence and produced tears. They share mistakes to show employees, new and old, that if you are running 100 mph, mistakes will happen, but the future success will overshadow them. That you can learn from them.

Culture is when leadership removes someone from the organization who is bringing others down even if he or she is the company's top producer. It's the right thing to do for the team.

Culture is holding people accountable. Pushing them to be better. Training them to learn how. Developing their skills and then allowing them to execute the directives. When people are challenged and pushed and they become better, you are establishing culture.

An employee who thinks of jumping ship can compare perks easily, but culture is much harder to evaluate. Instead of focusing on temporary benefits, leaders should focus on creating an environment which makes your company hard to leave.

—*Tom Gimbel*