

Building Life-Long Relations With Your Ex (Employee)

THOUGHT PAPER

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One of my networks on LinkedIn recently shared a moving post about his professional journey spanning three decades. In the post he individually acknowledged managers and organizations that had shaped his successes. The touching post showed his deep relationships with previous managers and organizations even after years of moving on. Given the reactions to the post, one could see that people were not only touched by it but it also created a very positive image about the leaders and organizations in their mind.

A great post and a great outcome. But how many such posts do we see on social media or how many times do our conversation with ex-colleagues include anything other than to deride our previous organizations or leaders?

Today, employers can no longer afford to break relations with employees or bear ill will when an employee departs. A [survey](#) reveals that 56 percent of Indian workers have changed their jobs at least once only after a short duration. [Millennials](#) are famous (more like infamous, though we cannot speak for the veracity of it) for job-hopping. Changing demographics and a completely new mindset about what defines job satisfaction has redefined the concept of workplace loyalty and lifelong devotion. Additionally, there is a growing realization amongst companies that outgoing employees are their strongest advocates or critiques to the outside world.

In times when lifetime employment remains only in anecdotes shared fondly by few and a single negative remark on a social media site can do irreparable damage to brand image, companies and HR managers need to offer employees the option of a lifetime relationship.

Here are some ways how this can be done:

1. Making the Exit Count

As we said, the days of "who cares how the employee feels, after all, he is leaving", is a thing of the past. While great detailing goes into designing an employee onboarding experience, similar attention to offboarding can leave a positive and lasting impression on outgoing employees, nudging them to endorse you as a brand, serve as a source of referrals and even consider re-joining in the future. Here are a few recommendations on creating a positive experience for the departing staff:

a) Exit Interview: Crux of Effective Communication

A positive exit experience begins much before the day an employee packs up their desk and walks out of the proverbial revolving door. It starts with regular conversations with employees about their workplace concerns and genuine efforts to improve their situation to retain the employee. It consists of giving employees safe space months ahead of their departure for a candid discussion on their experience at the company and plans for the future. It includes creating a comfortable environment that encourages honesty and welcomes criticism and using this feedback for reducing voluntary departures. **Exiting employees want to feel heard. Open and safe communication is key to a "good exit".**

b) Give Them a Pat on the Back to Remember

All healthy relationships have a commonality - that the people involved appreciate each other and are made to feel that they matter. This is true for professional relations too. **To forge a lifetime relationship with departing employees it is important to communicate your appreciation to them.** Ensure that you let them know that you are thankful for the time and effort they put into their work. You can set the right tone for an amicable and professional departure by acknowledging outgoing employees' contributions to the workplace and making them feel proud of their achievements. Given an opportunity to look back fondly (and with pride) upon their time in their organization, employees are more likely to stay engaged in the future.

c) Make Offboarding a Celebration Too

In most companies new employees are welcomed into the fold with much fanfare and swag-offboarding should be celebrated too. In their last few days, be sure to organize a goodbye event- a lunch, happy hour at a restaurant, allowing outgoing employees to enjoy closure with their team members and creating further bittersweet memories for them to look back upon. Give them a small gift or a personalized card with kind words from all team members as tangible proof of your appreciation for them. **The end goal is to design an experience that infuses employee departure with respect and dignity, helping them leave with their head held high.** This serves the two-fold purpose of establishing a lifelong relationship with departing staff and influencing remaining employees a demonstration of care.

d) Make Offboarding Formalities Easy!

Remember what they say about setting someone free if you love them? Well, it holds true for employees as well. It's common for companies to take anywhere between 15 to 60 days to complete exit formalities, issue experience letter and clear full-and-final settlement. The strongest professional bonds can break under the weight of the long drawn out wait and cumbersome formalities involved in offboarding. **Employees are more likely to remember (and return to) their previous employees fondly if leaving is made quicker and easier with fewer rounds to the HR and various other departments.**

2. Establish a (Meaningful) Alumni Network

Companies can no longer afford to have a great employee experience end with resignation or an exit interview. **To build relations beyond an employees' work tenure, organizations need to establish a modern alumni network that provides reasons for meaningful engagement** and gives its members a sense of belonging and inclusiveness. Some suggestions to do this are:

a) Fill the Networking Gap

[Studies](#) show that though nearly 80% of professionals consider networking to be important to their career success nearly 40% find it difficult to keep in touch with their network-revealing a huge gap in the way professionals feel and their actual networking behavior. **Providing them with networking opportunities at a time that works for them is a value proposition most professionals won't forego.** Some of the big consulting firms host regular alumni events ranging from happy hours to conferences to charity auctions exclusive to alumni members. Not letting social distancing hinder their engagement strategies, they have leveraged LinkedIn and Facebook groups for networking with activities like Live Chats featuring a current employee and an alum. An effective alumni program with access to free or subsidized training programs and access to proprietary (and not sensitive) information are benefits that can ensure that employees remain in touch long after they leave.

b) Provide Meaningful and Personalized Content

Alumni members don't want to be just updated about upcoming events and company announcements (though that is relevant too), **they want a platform to which allows them to communicate and share thoughts and feedback with other alumni and current employees.** While newsletters can keep members informed about industry and company happenings, a dedicated website with content that excites the alumni will notch up the engagement level.

We all would also agree that what interests an ex-vice president will be very different from what a young associate who has left to pursue higher studies would be keen on. **Lifetime relations are not built by pushing out the same content to names on an excel spreadsheet.** They are built by giving specialized, individual attention and tailoring content / messages to suit personal needs.

The Hidden Stakeholders in a Lifetime Relationship

The verdict is unanimous. In a race for talent, companies that invest in lifelong relationships outperform (and hence outlive) those who don't. Unarticulated benefits of establishing a lifelong relationship are far-wider than creating a pool of talent or referrals. It lies in the direct impact on bottom lines and tangible returns. Companies that do not have the wherewithal to invest in such relationships are running a huge risk- the risk of losing the [cross-pollination of ideas](#) when someone leaves to join another firm and the risk of missing out on showing new recruits all the possibilities the future holds for them (and thus motivating them to perform well). These are the hidden stakeholders of a lifetime relationship. These are the hidden gems you need to unearth.

About the Author



Mainak brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak holds a MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and is a certified executive coach.

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