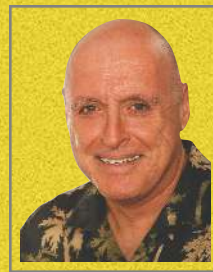


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



835 How to Replace the Irreplaceable Worker

You have an employee whom you feel is absolutely critical to your success, and one day they tell you they're moving on. Or, it becomes necessary to terminate them. In your mind, they're irreplaceable. What are you going to do. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next, on The Extra Point.

How do you replace the "irreplaceable" employee? For those who respond to my question with, "Nobody is irreplaceable and the business will go on," I agree — except under what conditions will it continue? We'll get to that.

For now, let's push aside the idea that you can somehow retain your big player, who we'll call Jackie. She is going to leave. Let's break it down.

1. The first consideration is how much time do you have before you need to make the replacement? If Jackie gives you two weeks' notice out of the blue, then it's highly unlikely you'll be able to find someone of equivalent skills in such a short time.

Critical point: Don't panic. Doing so leads you to getting a rush of people in the door, doing fast interviews and picking who you think is the best of the bunch. If not that, you'll grab someone else on the team and slap them into the key role when they're not ready.

Either way, this is often disastrous, as your hire will have a greater than usual chance of failing.

Critical point: Expect a reduction in performance. It's almost always part of the cost of replacing a major talent like Jackie. You're going to have to scramble to cover her work responsibilities, while going through the recruitment process.

Back to square one, and let's change the scenario. You've got a great relationship with

Jackie, she is emotionally invested in the team's success, and she wants to give you the maximum notice possible so the company can find the right replacement and make a smooth transition.

2. With the advantage of time and Jackie wanting all to go well, you ask her to play an active role in the process of choosing the right candidate. This is an advantage for several reasons.

a. Big producers almost always know other big producers, whether we're talking about salespeople, managers, IT superstars, specialized technicians, you name it. They likely know the best talent, and may also know who might be open to an offer.

b. If you're thinking of replacing Jackie with someone already on the payroll, I'd welcome her opinion on each prospect. Managers don't see everything, and Jackie may know things I don't, or view people in a way I don't. If she is firm in her opinion that a person is wrong for the job, I'm certainly going to take notice of that.

c. Everybody I've ever known who might be considered "irreplaceable," could sniff out high performers instantly. I'd include Jackie in the interviews.

Too many companies get this process wrong, overestimating the skills of potential candidates, and figuring they'll grow into the role. They may also underestimate a worthy candidate and ignore them. A good leader effectively evaluates talent, and whenever possible, gets qualified interviewers to help.

Now, let's briefly mention how to strengthen your position, to help you avoid this problem.

3. What kind of training and development plan is in place at your company?

(Con't.)

If Jackie is your number one talent, what are you doing for those who rank behind her? Are you consistently building their skills, as well as providing experiences that will prepare them to move up when the opportunity shows up?

4. Are you on a friendly basis with key talent in other organizations, both your industry and others? Would you be able to meet with at least three potential candidates in the next five to ten working days, if you got the two weeks' notice today? Do you have current contact information for the ones who would be on your "short list"?

5. Assume you are Jackie's boss. Most important of all, are you as a leader meeting her needs, other than straight financial? Do you know her well, her priorities, and her goals? Do you sit down with her a couple of times per year to find out how you can help her do even better? Are you coaching her, reassessing and resetting goals?

If you are doing these things and have this kind of relationship with your major talent, I'd say it's almost impossible for you to be surprised with a two-week notice.

Losing a key worker is no fun. It can be traumatic. Hopefully, something we talked about today will make the loss easier to handle, or to avoid altogether.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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