

# Fear... A Retention Nightmare

When you educate your people, you eliminate speculation, uncertainty, and self-serving communication—and reduce several major sources of fear. **BY JEFF KORTES**



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In the last several weeks, managers I work with have told me people in their organizations are still fearful despite the fact that they have seen an improvement in business in the last year. So what is driving this fear?

1. Uncertainty about the organization’s direction and the potential impact on a person’s position.
2. Punishing people for making mistakes when they take initiative.
3. A boss or other senior leader who uses fear as a tool to run his or her area of influence.

In all cases, the result tends to be the creation of an aversion to risk taking. Everyone is afraid to say or do what they need to in order to do the best job possible. They play it safe. Then one day, everyone wakes up and finds they can’t keep good people or the business is in a death spiral.

Uncertainty about the organization’s direction is the easiest to deal with. The answer: Communicate with your people. Now wasn’t that easy? A well-

- Managers and leaders at all levels need to get out in the cube factory or on the plant floor and start talking with people daily. You will hear concerns and be able to address them.
- Have an open door, so people come in and ask questions.
- Hold departmental meetings that provide a consistent message, a forum for ideas, and a place to bring up concerns about how the department is functioning.
- Develop regular postings and updates using e-mail, company intranet, or written notices.

A quick note on meetings: Everyone thinks that when I mention meetings I am referring to long, drawn-out events. Only if you let them be long and drawn out! They can range from five minutes to an hour, depending on what you want to accomplish. Frankly, 90 percent of the meetings that last an hour or more are just people rambling on, in my experience. Keep them short, sweet, and to the point. The

goal of every meeting should be *educating* people and *generating actions that drive results*. Information and education will eliminate fear—and drive understanding of what it takes for the business to succeed. Both of which reduce turnover and improve how the business operates, as well. **Retention does not exist in a vacuum...it helps to drive organizational success!**

This is the meat and potatoes. Anything beyond these two points is pure gravy. When you get information out and educate

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thought-out communication strategy is *the* best way to effectively drive communication. Don’t do it in a haphazard way. Sit down, strategize, and develop a well-layered approach using multiple types of communication. By doing so, you make sure everyone hears the message multiple times and in different media. Use the following list and you will cover 95 percent of what needs to be covered without having a big fancy system that looks great but wastes time and probably doesn’t get through to employees anyway:

your people, you virtually will shut down the negative influence of the internal grapevine. By doing so, you eliminate speculation, uncertainty, and self-serving communication. When you do that, you significantly reduce several major sources of fear. The beautiful thing about this approach: Even if you are only a supervisor or manager, you can do most of these things in your “sphere of influence.” So even if the organization chooses not to do some of these things, you can still make an impact. **E**