Leading Well – November 2026

Practical Questions & Answers for Frontline Leaders

Q: One of my strongest employees continues to do excellent work but lately seems less enthusiastic and rarely volunteers for new projects. Should I be concerned about losing her?

A: Strong performance doesn't always mean an employee feels engaged. Sometimes dependable employees continue meeting expectations long after their enthusiasm has faded.

Rather than assuming the employee is unhappy or considering leaving, initiate a conversation about what motivates her. Ask questions such as, "What parts of your work are you enjoying most?" or "Are there opportunities you'd like to explore?"

Employees don't always expect promotions or major changes. Sometimes greater involvement in decisions, new responsibilities, or simply feeling heard can renew their connection to work.

Regular conversations about engagement are often more valuable than waiting until an employee announces plans to leave.

Q: I regularly thank my employees for their hard work, but I'm not sure it makes much difference. What does meaningful recognition actually look like?

A: Recognition is most effective when it's specific, timely, and genuine. A general "good job" is appreciated, but employees are more likely to feel valued when they understand exactly what they contributed.

For example, instead of saying, "Thanks for your help," try, "The way you handled that frustrated customer helped resolve the situation and made a difference for the entire team."

Remember that employees have different preferences. Some appreciate public acknowledgment, while others prefer a private conversation or additional opportunities to contribute.

Meaningful recognition doesn't require a budget or formal program. It requires paying attention to the efforts and accomplishments that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Q: An employee recently told me she feels overlooked for opportunities, even though I believe I've treated everyone fairly. How should I respond?

A: Fair treatment and perceived fairness aren't always the same. Employees may interpret decisions differently when they don't understand how opportunities are assigned or advancement decisions are made.

Begin by listening without immediately defending your decisions. Ask what opportunities the employee feels she's missing and what professional goals she'd like to pursue.

Then explain the factors that influence assignments or advancement, including skills, experience, and organizational needs. Where possible, identify practical steps the employee can take toward future opportunities.

Transparency doesn't guarantee agreement, but it helps employees understand that decisions are based on consistent expectations rather than favoritism.

Q: A valued employee recently told me he's questioning whether his current career is right for him. I want to support him, but I also don't want to encourage him to leave. Could the EAP be helpful?

A: Yes. Career dissatisfaction doesn't necessarily mean an employee needs a new job. Sometimes it reflects uncertainty about personal goals, competing priorities, stress, or changes in what someone finds meaningful.

As a leader, you can explore opportunities for growth within the organization without pressuring the employee to stay. Ask what feels unfulfilling and whether different responsibilities or development opportunities might help.

The EAP can also provide a confidential setting for employees to discuss stress, personal concerns, and life decisions that may be influencing their outlook. It isn't a career placement service, but counseling can help employees gain perspective and consider their next steps.

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