

Business **STILL** Unusual

Adapted from Wall Street Journal's best seller *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay – 2nd Edition*
by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans (Berrett-Koehler, 2002)

It is hard to believe that it's been almost a year since our normal routine was tragically disrupted and the world as we knew it was changed forever. Today, many of us continue to reflect on where we were, what we were doing, and how our lives have inalterably changed since September 11, 2001. You may find this September brings a host of new behaviors, or replays others from last year, as you and your associates experience this emotionally charged first anniversary.

Last year, Career Systems International offered a number of options to assist managers who wanted to support and comfort their coworkers during those tragic times. We find our suggestions remain relevant and would like to revisit them while submitting some new ones.

*The 26 actions below are based on the strategies described in
Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay.
Select the ones that seem the most appropriate for you and your team members,
and share them with your other business colleagues as well.*

A **What matters most?**

Take time to talk with your employees. Not necessarily a formal meeting. Maybe over coffee or a soft drink. Just **ASK** them one question, such as "What matters most to you right now?"

B **It stops with you.**

BUCK... Most of you are in charge of certain assets. You are held accountable for protecting those assets and for growing them. Your most valuable assets are people, not property. Outstanding people give you and your organization a competitive advantage. Regardless of the job market, you need to hold on to your best. And it's you who can best make that happen.

C **Have an honest talk about the future.**

Offer to have a **CAREER** conversation with each employee. Hold it in a quiet, private place and listen hard. Issues that were not so important prior to September 11, 2001 may continue to impact employees' commitment to the job. Find out what is different about their career needs moving forward.

D **Respect the individual and individual differences.**

DIGNITY... In order to respect and honor your employees you must celebrate the differences between them. This is especially important in times where differences have escalated into world conflicts. One way to honor diversity is by learning how your employees differ. Hold a discovery day, where employees are encouraged to talk about themselves, how they grew up, the holidays they observe, and why.

E **Give them a chance to make their lives richer, more rewarding.**

Support the employees who need to spend time off to do volunteer work. It can help them grow and **ENRICH** in more ways than just professionally. They may learn in ways that can help them be more productive when they focus on their work. Recognize them, reward them, and most important, have a discussion about their experiences in volunteer activities.

F **Recognize your employees' families.**

Ask how their **FAMILY** is doing. What has changed at home for your employees over the past year? How can you support them or what might you be able to do to help them? For example, allow employees' children to come to work with them occasionally.

G **Discuss your employees' short and long-term career needs.**

Offer to brainstorm alternative possibilities. Some of your very talented people may still be rethinking their careers. You could lose many of them if you're not in tune with where they may now want to take their careers. Help them set some **GOALS**.

H **Help them find the right fit – inside your organization.**

HIRE... Support an employee interested in learning about other job openings in your organization. While many employees now think "Life's too short!", they're also thinking about where they may fit better. Although you may hate to lose them from your team, you'll no doubt want to save them for the enterprise and keep them from wandering to the competition.

I **Now is not the time to withhold information.**

As our nation continues in an ill-defined war, struggles with an uncertain economy, and copes with continuous reports of company executives defrauding employees and investors, it is not the time to keep quiet. Provide employees with **INFORMATION** about issues that will impact the organization. Tell them how the organization is doing and how it is dealing with the changing world of business. And remember, in the absence of information — they'll make it up!

J **JERK... Don't be one and don't tolerate them.**

Since the September 11th tragedy, emotions continue to be more open and vulnerable than they were before. Bad behavior that could have been shrugged off with "That's just the way he or she is" can no longer fly. Have zero tolerance for **JERK**-like behaviors among managers who report to you, and sincerely ask yourself if you are also in a small, or large part, guilty of any of those behaviors. If so, commit to change. Since September 11, 2001 we need to strive for a kinder, gentler (jerk-free) workplace.

K Don't forget the benefits of having some fun.

Mental health professionals and life experience tell us that "Laughter is the best medicine" in the midst of stress, and we have all had more than our normal share of stress this past year. Allow laughter, support some fun, loosen up a bit – have some **KICKS**. Ask your team what they might want to do to relax, take a break or enjoy themselves. Do they want to go to a movie together, order pizza in for lunch or play softball together? Maybe so – maybe not. Some won't want to plan fun activities, but will simply want you to allow it to happen spontaneously.

L Create connections.

LINK... Getting your employees involved in community service is another way to help them feel linked. Promoting a cause within your department or company gives employees a sense of pride, promotes teamwork, fosters a bond among employees, and provides skill development as well.

M Nurturing relationships.

What employees want in a **MENTOR** is often precisely what they want in a manager who cares. Get to know your employees and give them every opportunity to get to know you. If you manage managers, model what you want them to do with their employees.

N Think twice about which numbers you cut to improve your financial performance.

If you think it's easier to meet your budget during these seemingly never-ending tough times by reducing head count, look **VERY** hard at reducing other **NUMBERS** first, and look to employee-related numbers as your last resort. You can't begin to estimate the positive impact on employee commitment and productivity such an expense reduction strategy has, and you won't even have to inform your employees about it... they'll know.

O These unusual times create unusual opportunities.

Use this time to work with your employees to identify **OPPORTUNITIES** that may have arisen in your organization because of the uncertain times we continue to face. It could be a task force or community-centered activity. It could be a new line of business, a product or service that piques their interest. If they're searching for new meaning, it may now have developed in their own back yard!

P Blend your employee's work and passion.

Some of your people have found a new **PASSION** about doing something over this past year to help in some way. Do you know what it is? Enable them to pursue this passion. And explore with them how to channel this passion in their everyday work.

Q Embrace exception to the rules.

Organizations that thrive during dramatic change learn to adapt their own rules to best support the situation. **QUESTION** whether you have done this with your people. Can you adjust the objectives this month? The time to bend the rules is now. If you're debating it, ask yourself... what matters most — the rules or the people?

R Reward those who help others.

Recognize and **REWARD** those who volunteer to work for the Red Cross or do other community work, and those who quietly go out of their way to help others. Acknowledge the employees or the family members who continue to bravely defend our nation by supporting their loved ones in visible ways while they are gone. They'll reward **YOU** when they return.

S Give them some space.

Give them options and the opportunity to do things differently. Create a new kind of "normal" by listening to the unique and diverse requests they may bring you. Ask, "Where can I bend the rules just a little to give my employees flexibility and **SPACE** in the way they do their work, the hours they keep, the way they decorate their offices? How can I make small concessions that will make a big difference to them?"

T Tell the truth.

Employees deplore surprises about their own organization, especially if they discover them in the newspaper or hear about them on the news, as has been the case lately. Tell them the **TRUTH** (as soon as you can) about how the organization is doing and how you believe it will affect them. Your honesty will be rewarded by good work and loyal, committed employees.

U Just listen.

They want you to **UNDERSTAND** how they're feeling. Not to fix anything – just to understand. Actively listen to your employees. Ask questions to learn more. Put aside your work when they come into your office, turn off your e-mail and let your voicemail handle your calls. Just listen.

V Honor your employee's values.

During these times of change and times of some incredible corporate dishonesty, values become more important than ever before. Employees reevaluate everything. **VALUES** may shift and create different priorities. Find out what your employees' values are, how they've changed, and how their workplace now aligns with their changing values.

W How does stress impact your team?

WELLNESS... If you see that someone is hurting... headaches, tiredness, inability to concentrate, irritability... don't just ignore it. Talk to them about what you're noticing. Ask if you can help. Have a long list of resources handy, including: Employee Assistance Programs, support groups, stress management courses, exercise classes, yoga. Take individual preferences and values into account as they select strategies that work for them. Then support their involvement in those stress management techniques.

X It's now a life they've never lived before.

The **X-ERS** who report to you have never been through a WW II, a Korean War, a Vietnam. They've never known the uncertain fate of a prolonged war and its impact on them and their friends. What was history has now become their reality, but in a way different than any other generation has experienced. Help them understand and be patient with them. Recognize they're coming from a perspective different from yours.

Y Power down.

YIELD... Control only when necessary. Subsequent to September 11th, people more than ever before feel they have little control over what happens in the world. Now is the time to allow them more control over their daily work.

Z There's a new high point and it isn't what it used to be.

"Business as usual" has not existed since the September 11th tragedy, nor will it ever return. The new peak of success for many of your talented people has been redefined. Embrace the 25 strategies above, and you'll be prepared to help your employees reach for their **ZENITH**, whatever it now is. The payoff for you will be committed, engaged people who will stay and play on your team during these business still unusual times.



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