

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2023 Edition

Feature

Creating a Speak-Up Culture

Get everyone on board and reap the benefits



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Speaking out against misconduct and blowing the metaphorical whistle is not always easy in the workplace. Fraud, harassment, waste and other misconduct can often fly under the radar of human resources for far too long, ultimately hurting the organization. Now more than ever, employees and external stakeholders demand accountability from organizations. Creating a company culture where everyone is comfortable speaking up against misconduct helps address these concerns and can significantly improve your organization's employee retention. Executive leadership must first understand the core components, the resources needed to support employees and how to implement them for employees to feel comfortable voicing their concerns.

Understanding Speak-Up Culture and Retention Benefits

An organization with a strong speak-up culture has a team of individuals committed to transparency and accountability. Fostering a culture where employees are comfortable communicating concerns from all levels requires inclusive resources and a policy that outlines a commitment to anti-retaliation. Conversely, a lack of appreciation, policy and program support can create an apathetic environment that suffers from chronic inaction.

Like any company culture shift, it takes time to reap the benefits, but they are worth the effort. A speak-up culture is created from the top down, meaning leadership needs to hold those who commit misconduct accountable. Leadership sets the guidelines and provides the resources to allow employees to speak up. Executives must lead by example. Deal with issues efficiently while informing all necessary stakeholders of the process. For sensitive matters such as harassment, that require anonymity, ensure you uphold this. For issues that involve the whole company or investors, lay out the facts to make your commitment to transparency known. Ultimately, when your leadership holds the organization accountable, employees will follow suit and hold themselves responsible for speaking up when they observe misconduct.

Once your employees feel comfortable with one another and trust their management, their work and the company's retention rates will begin to reflect this, primarily because your employees are your best brand advocates. They will be more likely to speak positively about your organization as an excellent place to work and do business with. This leads to better brand recognition which can help vet new talent. Additionally, current client and stakeholder relationships will improve with less churn and more consistent communication.

Tips for Fostering a Speak-Up Culture to Improve Employee Retention

Firstly, you want to make known that regular employee feedback is welcome and encouraged— not just when something goes wrong. Regularly scheduled company-wide surveys are an excellent way to gauge employee satisfaction and determine where to allocate supplementary resources. Asking tailored questions helps to get a pulse on the overall company culture to help mitigate issues before they arise.

Another crucial step that targets employee concerns is through 1:1 meetings with their direct supervisor. These meetings should balance providing employee feedback with allowing the employee to provide their supervisor with feedback on company processes. Topics can range from how they feel about their workload to bringing up more serious concerns that may require escalating to higher levels of management. The

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time for the employee to speak their thoughts, suggestions and concerns should take up the majority of the meeting.

While 1:1 meetings are great for creating an open dialogue, employees will often want to bring up more severe concerns anonymously. Historically, this is for a good reason. When an employee has factual information that could potentially hurt the company or a colleague or knows of a severe case of misconduct already occurring, they may fear coming forward and having their name suddenly attached to the issue. However, from the organizational perspective, you want to know this information. In these situations, anonymous reporting tools are a vital and tangible resource for employees and external stakeholders to report any issues or concerns. You can implement reporting tools such as a hotline, web intake form or manual dropbox, depending on the nature of your organization and have it monitored internally or externally. The most crucial factor is upholding a high standard of confidentiality and having the necessary anti-retaliation policy in place. Taking the proper steps to determine which reporting tool works for your organization will help ensure it is not misused and that employees trust the system and, in turn, trust the organization.

Even with the implementation of reporting tools, employees need ongoing training and encouragement from management. Advocate for the importance of speaking up by hosting quarterly lunch and learns, where you share sanitized case studies and offer real-life scenarios that assist employees in identifying the behaviours that should be reported.

Ensure that you outline how the whistleblower was protected in these cases to help foster trust in the process.

When executive leadership takes the necessary steps to implement employee resources, such as experience surveys, 1:1 meetings and anonymous reporting tools, employees become more inclined to speak up. The benefits are two-fold: employee satisfaction and retention rates increase while a strong and respected brand reputation is upheld. There is no 'one size fits all' solution to creating a speak-up culture, so listen to your employees and be prepared to implement their feedback.

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