GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Consistent Coaching

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Turnover has become one of the most expensive and frustrating problems facing businesses today. In greenhouses, nurseries, landscape firms and garden centers, the impact is felt immediately. When someone leaves, schedules get tighter, productivity slows, service suffers and the remaining team often starts asking whether they should be next.

Employees often don't walk away from companies as much as they walk away from environments where they feel stuck, overlooked or unsupported. When people can't see a future, can't grow or they feel like no one is invested in their success, the exit door starts to look attractive. That's why coaching has become one of the strongest tools available for reducing turnover.

Coaching is frequently misunderstood as correcting mistakes or stepping in when someone underperforms. Real coaching is much broader than that. It's the consistent practice of helping employees improve, develop, solve problems and see progress in their role. It creates the feeling that someone at work genuinely cares about both personal and professional success for the employee.

Gallup research proves that employees who strongly agree there's someone at work who encourages their development are dramatically more engaged, while employees who lack that encouragement are far more likely to disengage. Engagement translates directly into commitment, enthusiasm, and involvement in work and the workplace, leading to significant increases in productivity, profitability and employee retention.

Quality coaching must be individualized, intentional and ongoing for each employee, rather than occasional or generic. Too often, development is treated like a once-a-year review, a single training seminar or a vague promise about future opportunity. Employees hear phrases like "keep working hard" or "there's room to grow here," but experience little real guidance. Coaching transforms development from empty aspirations into daily reality. Consider a strong seasonal employee in a garden center who shows initiative, helps customers well and works hard through spring rush. Without coaching, that employee may assume the role is temporary and start searching elsewhere by midsummer. With coaching, a manager notices strengths, discusses future opportunities, teaches merchandising skills, delegates responsibility and outlines what advancement could look like next season.

The employee feels valued, seen and heard on a personal level, leading them to work with excitement and commitment. They return for another season with increased experience and expertise, making each subsequent season run more smoothly than the last. As a result of increased capability and value creation, they earn more

responsibility and pay. People stay where they can see momentum.

That momentum often comes through simple, repeatable conversations. Managers can start by asking employees questions that uncover aspirations, challenges and growth opportunities such as: What do you enjoy most about your work? What challenges would you like to take on? What would help you grow over the next six months? What can be done to help you achieve your goals? Those conversations communicate value in ways paychecks alone cannot.

Managers sometimes avoid coaching because they believe they don't have time. In reality, most managers are already spending time dealing with the consequences of not coaching. They spend hours rehiring, retraining, correcting preventable mistakes, covering shifts and managing morale problems after good people leave. Coaching isn't extra work—it's preventive work. A five-minute conversation this week can prevent a five-week hiring scramble later.

Coaching also strengthens trust, which is one of the strongest predictors of retention. Employees don't expect perfection from leaders. They do expect honesty, consistency and interest. When managers regularly check in, listen and follow through, employees feel anchored. When communication only happens during problems, employees feel invisible until something goes wrong.

Another reason coaching reduces turnover is that it helps employees win sooner. New hires especially are vulnerable in the first months. They're learning systems, wondering if they fit in and deciding whether the job matches expectations. A manager who coaches early by clarifying priorities, recognizing progress and answering questions can dramatically improve the odds that the employee stays long term.

This is especially critical in labor-tight industries where replacing one dependable employee can cost far more than many owners realize. Recruiting ads, interview time, onboarding labor, lost productivity and customer disruption all add up quickly. Retention is always cheaper than replacement when employees have potential and coaching is one of the lowest-cost retention strategies available.

The best coaching cultures aren't complicated, but do include a few consistent habits. Managers meet with employees one-on-one on a regular basis. They ask about progress, obstacles and goals. They notice strengths and give people chances to use them. They celebrate improvement, not just outcomes. They talk about future opportunities before employees start looking elsewhere. They make development part of normal operations instead of a special event.

The best managers treat coaching and growth as an ongoing process. This sets a new direction for culture, as employees wrongly assume development only means promotion. In fact, development from coaching can also mean learning new skills, gaining exposure, receiving mentoring, taking on meaningful responsibilities or being challenged in new ways. Not every employee needs a title change right now, but nearly every employee needs to feel they're moving forward.

For owners and managers wondering where to start, begin this week with one question for each direct report: What would make this a better growth year for you? Then listen carefully. The answers will often reveal exactly why people stay, why they leave and what leadership should do next.
Turnover is rarely solved through slogans, perks or desperate hiring pushes. It's solved when employees believe their future matters to someone where they work. Coaching creates that belief. When people feel seen, supported

and developed, they become more engaged, more productive and far less likely to leave. **GT**

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