

Collaborate or Frustrate: How a Leader's Mindset Affects Team Culture



A new survey from the Pew Research Center found that people left jobs in 2021 due to low pay, a lack of opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected at work. The results confirm what many of us already know—when leaders do not see people as unique, valuable individuals, those people disengage and depart. In this article, I'll explain how a leader's mindset can be the difference between a culture of collaboration or frustration and provide a simple question to help leaders build relationships based on mutual respect.

People left jobs because of pay, opportunity, and respect

[The Pew Research Center surveyed U.S. adults earlier this year](#) to gauge the top reasons workers left their jobs in 2021. The results highlight and confirm existing frustrations for many people, such as low pay or lack of mutual respect. They also show heightened considerations due to the pandemic like child care challenges and the need for flexible working arrangements.

According to the article and report:

Majorities of workers who quit a job in 2021 say low pay (63%), no opportunities for advancement (63%) and feeling disrespected at work (57%) were reasons why they quit, according to the Feb. 7-13 survey. At least a third say each of these were major reasons why they left.

Roughly half say child care issues were a reason they quit a job (48% among those with a child younger than 18 in the household). A similar share point to a lack of flexibility to choose when they put in their hours (45%).

Leaders build effective teams when they consider their mindset

Your mindset—how you see challenges, choices, opportunities, and people—impacts your behaviors and the results you create for your team and organization. So let's consider how your mindset might affect each of these reasons for leaving a job, starting with respect.

A mindset where I am alive to the needs, challenges, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of another person is what we refer to as an [outward mindset](#). When I lead with an outward mindset, I am curious about the people who work with me. This is because they matter like I matter. Because of this, I can follow my natural sense to learn about and respect their needs and challenges.

Of course, what requires respect will be different for each person. Still, the act of understanding how another person values their time, ideas, burdens, struggles, efforts, and desires is how you can build a strong relationship.

A person leaving a job because they do not see an opportunity for advancement might result from circumstances beyond your control—there are a limited number of roles, or a company has

restructured a team. But let's consider what you can impact.

- Do your team members understand who and how they impact others in the organization?
- Is there a path into another role through improved capabilities and skills?
- Do both of you see this opportunity?
- Do you know the hopes and aspirations of your team members?

I worked with a senior leader in a large financial organization struggling to motivate a teammate. The teammate was in a new role that utilized new technology and impacted multiple team members. The leader saw the role as a fantastic opportunity. However, the teammate was often unresponsive and quiet about the new role.

Rewards, encouragement, and additional responsibilities did not change the teammate's behavior. I invited the leader to ask the teammate about their aspirations (beyond the current organization) during their next 1:1. The leader discovered that the teammate aspired to open a personal training business.

They were struggling in their current role because it seemed so disconnected from their dream. Additional discussions helped both the leader and the teammate identify responsibilities that would contribute to department goals while also assisting the teammate in developing valuable skills and experience for a (potential) future career.

Get curious about a person's effort

Low pay is a topic that is rarely discussed between leaders and team members. Even the phrase "low pay" in the survey creates an impression that the issue is too large for the leader or the employee. Often the subject stays hidden until you hire a new teammate or conduct a performance review.

Again, let's consider what you can impact. To do that, we can focus our curiosity on a related phrase—effort.

When we hear that our teammates are leaving for “more money” or because of “low pay,” we often assume that the person was not loyal or greedy. But unfortunately, that mindset stunts our curiosity.

Instead, consider becoming curious about the effort required by your team to achieve their responsibilities and the effort needed to be present, focused, and thoughtful. Here again, we are considering what we might not know.

Thinking about responsibilities, is it possible that we don't understand how their role has changed or evolved? Do we know what tasks are taking up too much time? Or what support they might need. As we continue to get curious about effort, what else might be a blocker or obstacle for them? Are these temporary or permanent?

Uncovering the answers to these questions may not solve all of the person's needs related to pay and compensation. Still, it will help you better understand what things you can do to recognize and reward their effort.

Improving employee relationships starts with a simple question

How have I made things harder for you?

Getting curious about a peer or teammate is essential to improving your organization's culture. Almost any question is a good question, but some are more revealing and inviting than others. Asking another person how you have made things harder for them will create a space for responses that have previously been ignored or subdued. The question invites you—the leader—to consider your actions and listen to feedback. Finally, it helps build a relationship of trust and

clear communication.

People leave jobs for many reasons. However, what is most concerning for any leader is when a survey knows more about why they are leaving than you do.

Even high-performing people need coaching

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