



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

How Do you Talk About Your Team Members When They Leave?

Shannon Waller: How do you talk about people after they've left your organization? What we're going to talk about today is whether you have a classy or trashy approach to team members. Stay tuned. Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, I want to talk about something that I think is really, really important for your company and for its reputation, not so much to the marketplace, it could matter there too, but especially to other team members with whom you work. And what I'm talking about is how do you talk about people after they leave you?

And this is really interesting. I think there are opportunities to talk about people in one way that's super helpful and acknowledging and positive. And there's another one, which is to talk, you know what, about someone and kind of malign them a little bit. And I think it's a very conscious choice. So let's kind of pick this apart a little bit. I'm going to start with the more negative approach first. It can be very tempting, especially if you are really frustrated by somebody, if they did not leave on good terms, if you let them go. Although most people know to keep their mouth shut because if the person suddenly exits the company, there's usually a reason.

But the other one, what if someone chooses to leave your company? How do you talk about them then? Are you acknowledging? Do you appreciate their contribution? Or do you go, yeah, they weren't doing such a great job anyway. I'm glad they're gone, et cetera. Now, why should you even care? Well, two reasons. One is for the team that you still have. The other one is because in my experience with both our own company and with my clients' companies, the other people hear it. People are still friends. They still keep in contact. So with social media, people are connected. And so if you are talking unkindly about someone, it's going to get back to them. Is that the reputation that you want?

First of all, if you have something to say to somebody, say it to their face. Do not stab them in the back with it, or have them hear it second, third, or fourth hand, where it can be very misinterpreted. So that's, for one thing, it could come back to bite you, and then they spread this sense of inauthenticity, and people say one thing to my face, another thing behind my back, and you can't trust them, you can't count on them. This is terrible for your reputation, and good luck trying to attract really great top performers, quote unquote, A players to your company if you talk about somebody after they're gone. So that's one thing.

But I think the bigger issue and the bigger cost is actually the team that is still with you. Because what happened—this is true in friendships, by the way. If you talk to your friend's face one way and talk about them behind their back in a different way, you get a reputation that is not kind because people start to clue in that you're two-faced about things, they can't trust what you say, and people start wondering, oh, I wonder what they say about me when I'm not around. That level of distrust, oh my goodness, it just wrecks teamwork. It wrecks trust, as I was saying. It just has people doubt. It puts people on the defense.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

How Do you Talk About Your Team Members When They Leave?

One of Strategic Coach's core values is no defense budget. You don't have to worry about it. You can step out there, take risks. We count on people to assume noble intent and positive intent, that even if you're screwing up, it's because you're trying to make a difference somewhere. It may or may not be working, but they assume positive intent. And that's how you don't have to play defense, because you know someone else, they might question it, but they're not gonna talk crap about you. So I think it's really important that we recognize the power of our words. And this is especially true in leadership, but frankly, just as true throughout the organization.

I will say, if you are the owner, founder, please, please, please watch what you say. What you say sets the tone. People will follow you. They will follow your example. They'll start talking poorly about other people, unless that's a culture that you want—people one-upping each other, being super harsh and critical, not giving grace. Then, by all means, have at it. In my long experience that is not the way to a successful Self-Managing Company that frees you up. So it's just really, really important that we pay attention, which sometimes means not giving into how we feel about someone. It means biting our tongue, all of the things.

Now, one of the people I think that does this the very, very best is Dan. And partly because Dan's attitude is people do things for their reasons, not ours. And so when people leave the Program, they've had maybe three years in Coach, four years, five years, 10 years in Coach, and they've been outrageously successful and surpassed all of their goals. And then they don't continue. It can be like, oh, why not? It's one thing. Bottom line is people do things for their reasons, not ours.

There was a great post from someone who used to work at Coach on LinkedIn yesterday, and she relates that when she came to say goodbye to Dan, he was so acknowledging of her and what she had contributed and basically said, go be successful, go have a great life. And she does. She's amazing. It was very cool to read her story with a lot of acknowledgement about the platform that Coach provided her to discover her own strengths and talents and passions. But they got supported by Dan. And the goodwill that that creates, oh my gosh, you know, two, three, four, five, six steps removed from you, say great things about you. I think that's phenomenal.

People who used to work for you go, oh my gosh, that is such a great company. Yes, you'd have a great time working there. You know, we need that. There's a war on talent, and I think we need to have a good reputation, quote unquote, back stage, not just front stage. So really pay attention to your words. So again, the situation, which is so easy to fall into, I have to say, especially if you are frustrated by somebody. So first of all, please have a clear conversation with them before they go so that you can be aligned or they know how you feel about things.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

How Do you Talk About Your Team Members When They Leave?

I've seen a quote from our fabulous client, brilliant client, Marlene Chisholm. I have a great interview with her, by the way. I encourage you to listen to it. We'll link it in the show notes.

And she goes, most workplace issues, I'm paraphrasing, go back to a tough conversation that someone did not have. I'm like, truth, I reposted it today. Like, yes, that is so accurate. And so have that conversation before they're gone. Good Lord. You know, make sure that you do that. Don't just gloss it over. Don't just sweep it under the rug. And then when they've actually left, say nice things. My goodness, your reputation will only be enhanced. Don't trash your own reputation by speaking poorly about people once they've left. And I've heard this all over the place. It's like, why are you doing that?

So as I was preparing for today, I thought of the expression, which is a really cool one, which is don't say anything unless it's true and kind and necessary. And so when I was researching it, it turns out that this comes from a poem written by Mary Ann Peitzger in 1872. So again, don't say anything unless it's true, unless it's kind and necessary. If someone is no longer working with you, is it really necessary to bitch and moan and complain about them? No, it is not. Say something that's kind. Talk about what their contribution was to you, what you appreciate about them. They're probably a great human being. Maybe they chose to have a different future than the one that you had anticipated. That's okay. People do things for their reasons, not ours.

And I think there's a graciousness and a humanity and a kindness that comes with that, that, again puts your reputation out into the world. And again, we never know who's going to be talking to who about us. We don't. It's a big, big busy place out there. And so that's the, that's the consciousness level I think you want to put out. So as tempting as it is, and sometimes we do have legitimate issues and beefs with someone, once they're gone, they're gone. Cut it off. Don't worry about it. What's done is done. Look to the future and say nice things. If you can say anything at all, well, what's the old expression? If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything. Which is a good reminder, but is it true, kind, and necessary?

So I just want to leave you with that. Obviously, that applies to most communication. However, I think when people are leaving your organization for whatever reason, it is especially important. And if it's only for your own self-serving reasons and your reputation, I think to do it, and if you need a higher-level reason, then you can be confident that what people are saying about you is true, kind, and necessary. I hope this is a good and positive reminder. Thank you so much for listening. And as always, here's to your team's success.