

Welcome to Bridge The Gap Contributor Wednesday, I'm Cara Silletto, President and Chief Retention Officer at MagnetCulture. We are a company exclusively focused on reducing unnecessary employee turnover for organizations across the country. And today, I'm going to focus my session on strategies to avoid a disconnect between management and the front line. In my discussions with leaders and workshops, with all of these managers and directors that we've been working with for years now, I'm starting to see this growing yet unconscious disconnect between those who have gone into supervisory management, department head, and executive level roles, really away from that frontline caregiver and the frontline hourly staff that we have within our organizations. So this growing disconnect, I absolutely believe is contributing to the revolving door of turnover that we are seeing, because we don't truly understand our people right now. We have a lot of assumptions. We think we do.

We get to know them. We laugh, we talk to them, but we don't really live in our frontline workers world. And when I say we, I mean, many of us listening to this today are probably in a management or supervisory role, or even above that. And so I want to make sure that we look at their lens, our lens, and really think about the world that we all live in today. Is it the same world? Is it the same stressors? Are the same things that keep them up at night the same things that keep you up at night? And my guess is it's not; it really isn't. So let's dive into what's happening. And of course, I'm going to give you strategies for reconnecting with our people or for avoiding a growing disconnect that tends to be unconscious.

We've got to bring that forward to our conscious mind and really think proactively about this issue that is impacting our ability to retain staff. So think about this. When you go to the gas station, do you care what the price of gas is? Now for me, when I go to a gas station, I'm going to use my credit card at the pump and tap my foot while it's authorizing and wait to pull the card out, then pick the type of gas I want, put the nozzle in and I do that, set it and forget it kind of click thing, you know, where you just let it pump until it fills up. And I might look at the price of gas and go, oh man, gas is going up. Oh, well, you know, that's a bummer, but I'm still going to fill my tank, right. It doesn't really matter to me how much gas is and it's not going to impact very much of my week, my month, my day, those types of things.

But many years ago, I will never forget being at the gas pump and doing exactly that when this older gentleman pulled up on the same pump, but the opposite side of me, he walked into the convenience store. Pretty quickly came out I'm guessing he didn't need any snacks. He was just paying cash for his gas, right? That's what you gotta do. If you're paying cash, you have to go in beforehand so they can set the pump to turn off when you hit your limit. Well, this guy comes out and he started pumping gas all the while I've got my set it and forget it kind of thing going on. He comes out pumps just a few seconds. I mean, we're talking 30 to 60 seconds, maybe worth of gas and it clicks off. The dude loses his mind. He starts yelling, not at me, but just the world, yelling at everyone.

What?! That's all the gas I get? Gas has gotten out of control. This is ridiculous. How am I supposed to get to work this week? This was a person whose life was impacted by the price of gas. He went on and on and on about how he was going to have to choose between groceries and gas to get to work. And how's he supposed to go make money if he doesn't even have enough money to get to work to where he makes money. Right? So that really opened my eyes that day of my sense of comfort or my level of comfort in my world financially speaking, that I don't even have to worry about how much gas is. So do

we really understand the stressors of our folks? Do we know that many of our frontline workers who happen to be lower wage workers, do we know what keeps them up at night?

Do we realize, of course we hear things from them about transportation issues, or I got a flat tire and I can't afford a new tire or many folks don't get oil changes. If you're struggling to keep the lights on or barely paying the bills, you're probably not going to budget for preventative maintenance, like many people in management and director and above type levels. Of course, I get my oil changed every three to four to five months, right? Whatever the little sticker in the corner of my windshield tells me that's what I'm going to do. But a lot of times our frontline workers don't have that. So then we get upset about them having car problems and calling off and whatnot. And yet they can't pay for the preventative maintenance and end up having more problems. If you've researched it all kind of the cycle of poverty, this is one of those things that happens is when you don't have a lot of money to take care of things that are needed, then more things are going to break and you're going to have bad luck that bad things happen to you that you can't afford.

Right? I can't even tell you what the statistic is, but in the country, there's a huge number of people who could not address a \$500 emergency. They do not have \$500 in the bank to address an emergency like that. So first things first, we really need to understand what's keeping them up at night and try to get in the mindset and the reality of that frontline workforce. Now I see this disconnect, kind of in different layers, different levels. So we of course have the wages and the socioeconomic issue of we don't have the same financial stressors as maybe the frontline workforce does because of that pay difference. We also have the generational disconnect, which I talked about on a previous episode a few months back, if you missed that, make sure you go catch it. But we talked about a generational disconnect of just how people were raised differently. The different mindsets and the different employer, employee relationship, not to mention that younger generations, just by nature, have less experience in our profession and are thus less likely to be in upper management positions where they can make more money.

So even from a generational standpoint, you know, the older you get, hopefully the more money you have earned over time and are earning greater wages. So that also can cause a socioeconomic disconnect as well, just based on a person's age and years of experience within a profession. Well then let's talk about flexibility. So there's a big difference in flexibility between the hourly workforce and the salary workforce. If you think about your flexibility, you know, if your kiddo has a doctor's appointment or an early soccer game or practice, or a fun holiday recital at school, a play or something that you want to attend, how big of a deal is that for you to just leave early or come in late? One of the biggest nightmares for hourly workers is a snow day, because of course, any of us who can work from home, maybe it's not as productive as it would be with the kiddos running around.

But those of us who have a flexible enough job and employer to allow us to work from home, it's a whole different situation for an hourly employee, particularly one that must be onsite to do their jobs such as a caregiver. I have friends who have, one of my friends lost her job because her school had too many snow days one year. You know, we live in an area that doesn't have very many snow days. We might have two, three, five in a big snow year for us. But one year we had a lot of snow. It was just every few weeks, we'd get enough snow to have another snow day. And this friend of mine who is an hourly

worker within her field, she literally lost her job because she called in and said, my kiddo has another snow day and I can't come in today.

And they said, too many points, you're fired. We're terminating you. She had no control over that. She does not have parents who can help. They actually both still work. And she actually has a child with special needs. So it's even harder to find a neighbor, a friend, a babysitter on short notice, particularly that can help in that type of situation. So we must understand that we have additional flexibility and that with that also brings more access, more resources. The more your wages are, and the bigger your network has grown within the profession. For example, as you've become a manager, director, and executive, or even owner of these organizations, you likely have the money and the network to then have access to more resources and more support. So my friend who's an hourly worker does not have the extra funds nor the resources and the network to survive on that snow day with backup childcare. Where I, on the other hand, have the finances, the network, and the resources that if I've got to pay somebody and figure out an option, I've got like a backup one backup, two backup three.

They cost me, but I have options because of my network and my resources. So this leads to an even larger disconnect between the management and leadership and the front line, when we've got the wage differences, the flexibility differences, those financial resources, and ultimately access to what we need. Those types of things. So I want you to think about that for a little bit. Consider the potential growing disconnect that may have happened or is happening or could happen between you and your workforce. Is it possible that that disconnect is there? Is it possible that we are so busy, right? We are so busy. We're just going through our day and we're fighting fires all day long. We're doing the best we can. And we say, Hey, how's it going? You know, trying to check in with our people, but is it possible that our workforce feels this disconnect and feels us just growing farther and farther apart over time?

You know what another piece of this conversation that I think is important is about keeping our promises, because it's also something that when we're in management and leadership, we can just kind of flippantly say, oh yeah, sorry, we can't do that right now, but we'll do that tomorrow or later. Soon, I'll get to that. I'll do that. And then of course we get busy and it goes on the back burner. Or we just honestly forget because we're dealing with a lot of other priorities and things like that. And I'm also finding that part of this disconnect is about keeping promises and about the trust that our workforce has in us. Do they trust what we say? Do they believe that we are going to follow through on what we promised and what we said we would do? A lot of us have really great intentions.

I think we all have really good intentions. And yet the day takes over. The schedule takes over. The email inbox takes over. The snow day at the last minute takes over. We've got to reroute and reprioritize and all of these things. But I think about this example with my child, if I say, now, I'm very, very strict about this. Okay. This is something that I don't really know where I got it exactly. But somebody told me don't ever lie to your kid. Don't ever lie to your kid. So I really took that to heart. So thank you to whichever mentor told me that. And I apologize. I can't remember, but I really took that to heart. And if I tell my kiddo, we pass an ice cream shop going down the road. And my kiddo says, mom, mom, can we get ice cream?

If I say, not today, buddy, but we can get ice cream tomorrow. Pr we'll get ice cream later. Even if I like make it generic. But we'll get ice cream later, but we can't today. We'll get it tomorrow. I am serious. I am 100% serious. I am not trying to blow him off. I am not saying, oh yeah, yeah. We'll do that later and hoping crossing fingers he's going to forget. He's not going to ask me later cause he's going to forget because you know what six year olds do, they don't forget. Any parents can feel me on this one. They don't forget. So then what happens the next day or the next time that we pass that ice cream shop and I go, mom, you said, next time. You said later, you said tomorrow we could get ice cream.

And the moment that you don't follow through on that, you're a liar. Right? I mean, let's just face it. You're a liar. If you explicitly said we will get ice cream next time, or we will get ice cream tomorrow, if you do that type of thing, and then the kid comes back to hold you to your word and you say, Hmm, no, I was just kidding. That breaks their trust. And then they don't know what to believe. That seems like a really petty example or like just a, yeah, it's just ice cream who cares. But how far does that go in their mind of building that trust? So I use this example with a kiddo, because I think that sometimes, and again with great intentions, but unknowingly, we lie to our people and we say that we're going to do something or we're going to get back to them on something, even something as simple as that.

Well, I'll get back to you. You will absolutely get a reputation of being the person they can't trust or the person that doesn't follow through on those things if we do that. Now you can change your language a little bit. I have told my son specifically, and of course I do this with my team at my office too, that I will change my language to say, we can't do that tomorrow, but I'm hopeful that we'll be able to do that sometime soon or maybe next time. And I'm very clear about maybe, I'm not sure, but maybe next time we can get that ice cream or maybe I can get that to you this week. You know, I'm pretty tight, but I I'm gonna, I'm gonna work on that. But it may be next week instead of this week, for example.

So I try to use very definitive, very clear language on followup type things. But, we don't mean the lie to our people, but sometimes we do because we promise a follow-up or we promise things that we don't, that we don't follow through on. And we don't ultimately come through with. So the moment that you lie to a team member or they feel that they've been lied to, not that you did it on purpose, of course, but the moment they feel they've been lied to, you've lost their trust and their loyalty. And those take a long time to reinstate and to regain. A long time. It takes way longer to regain someone's trust than to earn it in the first place or to keep it once you have it. So I want you to think, think hard about this one. Is there a chance, is there a chance that you or your leaders, your supervisors, your managers...

Is there a chance that any of you aren't always keeping your word? Even about things like the hours that you offered somebody when they were hired. About potential promotions that they're hoping to get. What about keeping your word regarding time off or some other flexibility that you offered or any other kind of perks that you offered or dangled or promised or whatnot, think about that? Are you an organization and a leadership team at every level that keeps your promises? Because if we're letting that fall through the cracks and thinking, oh, well, you know, I tried or I just forgot and things like that, that could absolutely be one of the biggest culprits of why people are walking away because they don't

believe you anyway. They don't believe that they're going to get the hours, the promotion, the perks, the flexibility, the I'm going to listen to you.

Hey, I know you had something you wanted to tell me. I want to hear it. I want to hear it, but I'm just busy right now. I'll listen later. Right? Do they believe you that you're going to come back around and listen to them? I mean, as little as that, it may seem little to us, but it's a really, really big deal to our staff that we keep those promises. That we listen, that we use very clear language about what we will and may or may not be able to do. There's a big difference. We want that language to not be ambiguous and to be very, very clear. In order to avoid this disconnect and the broken trust that we may find with some folks. So keep in mind, keep in mind friends. It is easy to find a \$15 an hour job with a bad boss.

Okay. Right now, today in most states, we are pretty open these days. And in most states it is easy to find a \$15 an hour job or less with a bad boss. So if you're that company that has supervisors and managers who are not effective in those roles, people are going to be quick to leave because guess what? They can go somewhere else and have a bad boss and a paycheck. So we have to create the better bosses. We have to mentor and train and coach develop these supervisors and managers and department heads to make sure that they are creating a place where people want to work and that they are actively and consciously avoiding a widening disconnect between them and their frontline. So if you have not picked up on it, all of these different strategies that we talked about of understanding their perspective, understanding your own unique situation and your own resources and access to things.

Understanding that even the generational disconnect and whatnot, the flexibility that you have, or don't have, all of those things, they all include some aspect of understanding yourself and or others around you better. This is how we're going to stay connected. We have to understand ourselves and understand those around us. The problem that I'm finding though, the barrier, the obstacle is that leaders need the time and the training to do this and I'm just not seeing it happen. So we have to be a little more careful that we're not using the wrong kind of language that's breaking trust. And we have to be careful that we are still giving our people time to stay connected with them because becoming an organization that is known for those qualities, that attracts people. That is very attractive to the candidates and applicants out there, because we are a company who says what we mean.

We mean what we say. We follow through on what we promise. We have great leaders. We are good communicators. That doesn't happen overnight. It takes investing in those proper development tools to create that place and those leaders who really strive for that strong connection with, and a greater understanding of the frontline. It is absolutely imperative that organizations set new expectations or recalibrate and reset the expectations for anybody in a supervisory role. And that that organization also provide the tools to keep their leaders from becoming disconnected. We have to keep this conversation going and make sure that it doesn't slip into the unconscious and just happened without us realizing it. Oh, and by the way, if you believe you're a leader and you're thinking right now, like, oh no, Cara, I have gotten to where I am today because I know my people and I have climbed the ladder. And now I am a department head. I am a regional leader. I'm an owner. I'm a board member. You know, I'm in top leadership positions, I've got a spoiler alert for next months Bridge The Gap episode. Your ability to read

the room and connect with your front line often drops. It drops when you reach the rector level status. Dun. Dun Dun.

So on next month's episode, I am going to discuss how and why that happens. And we're going to continue getting to know our workforce in order to create a better place to work. So that's all for today. We're going to talk more about the workforce and leadership strategies next month. And of course, if you want more retention strategies, in the meantime, you can always grab a copy of my book, *Staying Power: Why Your Employees Leave and How to Keep Them Longer*. It's available anytime on Amazon, Kindle, or audible. I'm Cara Silletto. And thanks for listening to this week's Bridge The Gap Contributor Wednesday. Don't forget to connect with me@btgvoice.com.

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