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Cara Silletto

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast. I'm your contributor host, Cara Silletto. If we haven't met yet, I'm the president and chief retention officer at Magnet Culture, a firm dedicated to reducing unnecessary employee turnover. And I'm the creator of the Employee Retention Ecosystem. Today, we're going to talk about professionalism, both from our team members and from us. Are we showing up with the level of professionalism that we need to lead others? And have we communicated those unwritten expectations well enough to make sure that our team members are hitting the mark every day, day after day?

Now, I started my career at a long-term care state association. I was the one who was running their conferences and writing the newsletters, and doing a lot of the behind-the-scenes work for the profession. And at that job, I didn't know that it was a big deal for me to walk to the copier barefoot at 3:00. Now, let me explain. We had no visitors coming in. There were just about ten of us who worked there, and I would just kick off my cute little high heels under my desk and walk to the copier at 3:00. I just didn't think that was a big deal, but boy, was I wrong because there were these ladies at our office who had been in the work world a lot longer than I had, and they felt like that was unprofessional.

Now, unfortunately, they didn't tell me that that was an issue. They told everybody except me. Which makes sense, right? You say, wow, she should know better. I shouldn't have to tell her that. And my favorite phrase of judgment. That's just common sense. Who doesn't know any better, right? We've all thought that or said that to a colleague. And what happened was an older colleague of mine came to me, more like a mentor, but almost like a big sister. And she came to me and said, hey, Cara, I think people would notice the good work you're doing that I'm noticing if you kept your shoes on the whole day, just keep them on. Or if your high heels hurt, just bring in some flats, okay? And when I found out why she had come to me with this information, that people were talking about me behind my back, I thought, well, this is crazy.

I didn't even know this was an issue. It was not covered in the handbook. It was not discussed during orientation. And so I thought they were out of line, just talking about me behind my back. And they thought I was out of line, not wearing my shoes to the copy machine. There was a lot of judgment that was happening, and it came down to this word: professionalism. But they felt I wasn't being professional in my behavior. And of course, I thought the gossip behind my back was also unprofessional. And so I learned over time that professionalism, that word is subjective, meaning your opinion, what you think is or is not professional. And right now, I'm sure you're taking a side, or are you on Cara's side, and you'd like to kick off your shoes too?

Or were you thinking, oh, why didn't Cara know better? Right. We all take a side, and it's based on what we've learned, what we've been taught, both growing up at home with our family and our other mentors, aunts and uncles, and family members. But also your first bosses. What did they teach you? What gaps did they feel for you?

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How did they help you navigate the work world? When you came in? Because if you think back, there were a lot of sides along the way that helped you figure out what was appropriate, what wasn't appropriate. And I can tell you, I've got a lot of battle scars in my 20s of times where I misstep. Luckily, I had really great mentors and great bosses who were kind enough not reprimand me but to pull me aside and just tell me what everybody else was thinking. Because guess what? Your staff can't read your mind.

Especially the new hires coming in and now being one of the oldest millennials. I'm 44 years old now, and I've been in the work world for a while, and I see folks coming in at 18, 20, 24, 28 years old, you know. But I work with and I'm astonished that they don't know what they don't know. And one of the things that has come to my realization as a leader is that if you look at where people are missing the mark, that can actually help you figure out where our organizations are lacking some training and lacking some communication.

In fact, I was just leading a two-day retreat up in Chicago. For some leaders who really want to become retention champions. And at the end of the program, when I ask everybody what their commitment is moving forward, and how they are going to change their behavior, their attitude, their approach? This one leader at the senior living organization said, you know, I never realized that when people complain to me, either about how the organization is operating, or they complain about someone else's behavior, that those complaints are really an opportunity for me as a leader or for our organization as a whole, as a culture to get better.

Because if I'm not complaining about what that person's complaining about, I'm not seeing it or I'm not seeing it from their perspective. But the moment a person comes to me and complains about how we do scheduling here, or that so-and-so isn't properly doing an activity or responsibility, right, a task. Then she said, I used to just blow those off as, oh, just quit complaining and it's fine. Whatever. But now, she said, I have this heightened understanding that when people come to me and complain, that tells me that's where a gap exists. And maybe if one person complains, it's not a big deal or not worth dealing with. If it isn't causing disruption. But when multiple people over time have the same concerns, whether it's concerns about, well, the new hires today just aren't showing up the way I want them to.

Okay, well then, what is it that we want them to do? We can communicate that. And a lot of my conversations are also around the fact that parenting has changed. School systems have changed. Our new workforce is coming in today, mostly the Gen Z crew that we see. They are not being told unwritten expectations or the traditional definitions of professionalism, the way that some of us, you know, even in our 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, how we see professionalism that is subjective.

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Now, I will give you a disclaimer here. And pardon my crassness, but some people just suck. Okay. I'm going to let you off the hook there. There are some people who just don't want to work. They really just want to blame the system, or do as little as possible and make as much money as possible, doing as little as possible. And that is not who we want to attract and retain. Okay. So I will let you, you know, acknowledge that there are some people who are just the worst. And really, we don't want those folks on our staff. But what I will not let you do is blanket that statement across an entire generation for Gen Z or even just across a big swath of the workforce, right? And say, well, nobody wants to work, and that type of thing. Because what I found is that those folks who really don't want to work or contribute in the way we want them to. It's a very small group of people, really; it's not very many people that don't want to contribute, don't want a job.

What I have found instead is most of those folks who we on the surface think, well, they just don't want to work or, you know, they're they're not giving it their all or whatever we're judging them about. Most of them, what I find is they just don't know what is expected of them because they've never really seen that type of leadership or professionalism before. But also it's that they. And the other reason is that many of them just need a mentor. They really haven't had anyone who has committed to them who has poured into them.

You know, not in a huge way, but even in a little way, that has helped them see what they don't know and helped guide them to be the professional that we want them to be, to show up the way we would like for them to show up. They just don't know any better or don't know any different. Right? So think about this. We each have what I deem our Goldilocks mentality. I don't know about you, but when I'm driving, I think I'm driving the perfect speed. And everybody driving faster or slower than me is not driving appropriately. They're driving too fast or too slow, and my speed is not the speed limit.

It's based on this secret formula that I have in my head of how many miles per hour above the speed limit. Do I have the risk tolerance to go that I think I won't get pulled over? Right. We each have that kind of formula in our head, and so we use this Goldilocks mentality not just on the road when we're driving, but also in work and life. I mean, I'm constantly judging other people by the way that they dress. When they show up to work. Whatever it is that they do that is different than the way I would have done it.

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My brain is going to go ding ding ding judgment. Why are they doing it that way? That's not the way I would have done it. And so each of us has to do that. Because our brain is wired to keep us safe. Now, we do have that judgment on purpose, wired in to make sure that we're observing our surroundings and other people in our surroundings to keep us safe. But it can cause a lot of trouble when we're trying to build connections and build teams at work.

So we've got to keep that judgment in check, my friends. Okay. In fact, I want to talk about that a little bit about how we reduce judgment. Now, there was a person I worked with years and years

ago with whom we just did not hit it off. Okay. We did not get along pretty much from day one. She had worked there when I started, and I felt like we had a bad first impression; we just didn't click. And after several months of working together, it was not getting better on its own. There was just this tension in every room when we were there together.

So another colleague suggested to me, you know, she was a little older, had great advice, and she said, look, somebody told me years ago, if you don't like somebody, you get to know them better. Because often we only know one thing about a person, or that first impression that we get, or we know just a few things, or have worked just a little while with them, and we think that's who they are. We just define them by that initial behavior, attitude, and perception, whatever it is. And instead, what I have realized is that when I get to know a person at a deeper level, then I can find some kind of commonality there.

There may still be things that we disagree upon or just don't click naturally, but at least I'll tell you if that person loves dogs. We're good because I love dogs. So I want to make sure that I can find some commonality with that person. Their hobbies, their family. What holidays do they love to celebrate? You know, something that we can find some commonality, and it brings some joy into that relationship instead of tension and animosity. So that's a really good tip. You might even need to use that with your team members if they don't know each other, that we help them get to know one another.

Now we have this hidden vault of resources at MagnetVault.com, and one of the popular worksheets in there is called the Get to Know You Sheet, because we teach leaders that they are responsible in their own department, and you are two for truly acclimating new hires into the team. That's not a job. It is a leader's job to make sure that each new hire feels comfortable and confident, and they understand their team. The role, the organizational expectations, all of that. So there's a know-you sheet that is really helpful when a new hire comes onto your team because it tells you not only about their family and hobbies, but also some information about their personality and preferences and things.

But I also like to ask how they like to be recognized and rewarded, or if they were to get a gift. What kind of gift cards do they like, and or snacks do they like, and different things like that. So that can also be a way for you to help your team find some commonalities. If you get those sheets and two people aren't getting along very well, you can look and say, oh my goodness, both of these people love tennis. Let me make sure that they both know that they love tennis, because that could be some neutral ground that they could connect on. Right.

And we also have to understand that people see the same situation from a different perspective, almost through a different lens. And so if I were to have a group of people stand in a circle, right, we're all shoulder to shoulder around the room. If I put a globe, you know, a globe of the earth in the middle of that circle on a table, and I ask people from different parts of the room, okay, over on my left, what do you see when you look at this globe? Well, somebody is going to say, I see South America.

And then I say, okay, the people over on the right are over in front of me. What do you say? What do you see? Someone's going to say, well, I see Africa. Well, I see Russia, I see China, you know. And is anybody wrong? No. Because even though they're looking at the same exact object, they are looking at it from a different perspective. But they could absolutely argue with each other. No, no, no, no, it is China. No, no, no, it's Africa all right. They could try to stand their ground and argue. But if they realize, wait a minute. If I step ten feet over to my left, it is Africa. I do see something different than when I'm ten feet to the right. And so that perspective activity really can help folks to see that there are different sides to every situation.

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And when you're looking at something that has happened or something right in front of you, we can have different perspectives on that, and not everybody is going to be right or wrong. There's not always a right or wrong. In fact, I find a lot of the world and life is gray. There's a lot of gray in the middle, and sometimes we have to help our team members find that as well. Now, sometimes we do have to acknowledge the obvious what we think is obvious. Kind of like me. Where? In my shoes. Right? Nobody said for several weeks, if not months. All right. You need to keep your shoes on. No one was acknowledging that obvious expectation.

And so I kept missing the mark over and over and over. So that's an easy way for us to bridge this gap. When you do see people behaving in a way that you deem unprofessional or not showing up the way we want them to show up, then we often have to communicate that expectation and acknowledge the obvious in a very kind way. By the way, we don't want to be condescending, and like, duh, don't you know this, right? But instead, I almost take that kind of big sister, big sibling approach of, hey, let me let you in on the inside scoop, some of the unwritten expectations that we have here, or that others have here. Maybe that's not even your expectation or your perspective, but somebody else is seeing it a different way. And you need to let your team members know how they're being perceived. Okay.

So that's really important to consider. And there are so many topics. In fact, a few years ago, a leader called me and said, we are struggling for our new hires to be professional, but yet we don't even know what professionalism looks like exactly. We know it when we see it or when we don't see it, and we certainly don't know how to define it or teach it. So, is that something you can help us with? And they planted this idea for us, which we came up with a series of videos. And this is so cool. We picked some of the top frustrations that leaders have, particularly about new hires who are not showing up in a certain way.

And we made 26 or 2 minute videos about different areas of professionalism. My favorite one is called Watch Your Mouth, and it is really about you never know who's within earshot. So even though you and a colleague are having a private conversation, you don't want to drop F-bombs because you might be within range of somebody walking by or someone right around the corner. You never know who could be listening, right? Especially if it's our residents and family members who are visiting, and of course, other colleagues as well.

But it's important that you think about what level of professionalism you want people to hit. They are missing the mark. Okay, we ended up calling that video series Hit the Mark for that reason. So, where are people missing the mark? You can quickly make yourself a little list of, you know, punctuality and attitude and customer service and mouthiness or, you know, whatever. Those things are their attire. You know, how they're showing up physically with their clothing and whatnot, and make a list of that, and then you can talk about each one of those things at a staff huddle or a team meeting, and just start checking off that list.

You may even want to rotate back to number one every few months, or weeks, and make sure that, especially your new hires, understand what some of those definitions of professionalism are, because they're not going to know any other way, any other way, any other reason than you might think. Well, they should know that because their parents should have taught them, or they haven't. They saw people get up and go to work. But honestly, I know some people who are in their early 20s and their parents who are in their 50s aren't what I would call professional.

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And I mean that not like in the title, that they hold or how much money they make. But the fact that this, you know, I know some 50-year-olds who don't care about being on time at work, they don't care what they look like when they go to work. They're not watching their mouth and being careful about how they communicate. Right. So sometimes these younger workers coming in, they truly have never even had a role model in their own parents or in their own household to show them what it means to get up early and care about making it on time to work, and being there five minutes early and making sure their clothes aren't all wrinkled.

You know, all of those things that I know my parents really drilled into me pretty early. Not everybody has that experience and that exposure. Okay. So we also have to shift gears here a little bit. Lead by example. We have to make sure that we're setting the right tone and showing the right behavior. Because again, I know folks of all ages who have punctuality problems, and even if they're very professional in other areas of their job and doing the work, if you're constantly late or missing work and you have a lot of excuses, oh, I missed a deadline.

Oh, sorry, I forgot those types of excuses that will hurt your credibility as well. And others will deem you not professional. Just because of that one thing, you could be doing everything else beautifully, but if you have a punctuality problem or you're mouthy, you know, or have an attitude problem at times, and things like that, that can also be a reason why you may not be getting promoted or getting the recognition you feel you deserve for the job well done. It may also be why your team is missing the mark, because they're not seeing that in you as their leader as well. So, a really famous quote. You know, I don't, I don't quote other people very often, but I just can't say this any better myself. But a famous quote that I love is from Stephen Covey, who wrote tons of books on leadership and built a big, beautiful trading company as well.

And Stephen said we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behavior. And this is so true and so helpful to think about. So let's go back to this example of maybe, you know, maybe there's a leader who has a punctuality problem and is late quite often. Or even if they're late just one time. Right. If that's me and I'm late when I'm coming in, I'm going to say, oh, but but but but right now it's no big deal, you know. Well, there was traffic, like there's not usually traffic in the morning. And today there was an accident. So that's why I was late, or, you know, I had some issues with my kids this morning before I had to get in here.

And I had to handle all of that, so, you know, sorry, but I just had some personal things going on. So if that was me, then I'm going to judge myself by those intentions. Well, I tried to get in here as quickly as I could, and I, you know, just had these other things come up as a priority to someone else on our team, particularly someone we're not fond of or we're frustrated by. If someone else shows up late and they say, oh, well, there was traffic or there was an accident and we immediately think, well, you should have accounted for that. You should have left early. You should have made sure that you would still get here on time, or if they had issues with their children that morning, and had to handle some personal issues and things.

Well, that's not our problem. As your company. You still should have handled that faster and gotten in here on time, but it really is a different view that we take. So I'm I'm going to read that quote one more time. We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behavior. So the behavior we see, that action that they finally take, which would be being late in this example, is how we judge others, while we give ourselves a pass because we're like, no, I had a good reason for that behavior, for being late, you know, that type of thing. So this is just a good thing to keep in mind as we work to reduce our judgment of others. Okay. We have to make sure that we're reducing that Goldilocks mentality, or at least we're aware of it, that not everybody's going to show up the way we do, that we really get to know people at a deeper level, especially if there's not that instant connection.

But we acknowledge the obvious when people miss the mark and say, okay, well, I didn't know. You didn't know that. So let me fill you in, and make sure that we lead by example. Right. So if you need to, you may want to do some more team building with your team. I know we're short-staffed. I know we're always underwater. And you think that you don't have time to do that? I'm not talking about taking a, you know, trip somewhere to build marshmallow towers or anything like that, but instead really think about, can we put some micro team building into our team huddles, into our interactions at least once a week, if not daily.

Now, in that vault at MagnetVault.com, there's also a list of two-minute teambuilding questions. Two minutes. And that's the whole activity. So, for example, and I do this a lot in my workshops, I'll start a workshop with all right, let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. And then tell us whether you like dogs or cats. Both or neither. And that gives people that instant connection. Remember I told you I'm a dog lover. I love, love, love dogs and anybody who loves dogs or has dogs. They're my new best friend. So that quick round robin of people answering the question can help you find that commonality on the team, especially with new hires. So that two minute

teambuilding questions, she asks things like, you know, peaches or mountains, Coke or Pepsi, different things like that that helps people find commonality.

But so it brings some joy to the conversation. We always kind of laugh and joke about people's different answers, and inevitably somebody goes off script and says, horses, you know, instead of dogs or cats. And it brings some laughter to those meetings as well, when we're all under a lot of stress. So remember, professionalism is subjective and it is so important to reduce your own judgment and reduce the judgment that exists across your team if you want to build stronger connections. All right. So that means we as leaders have to be as professional as possible. And we have to help our team members understand those unwritten expectations to ensure folks with different backgrounds, different perspectives, and just different approaches can work well together to provide the greatest quality care possible for our residents. Right?

That's our goal here. So I hope you've gleaned some great tips and tricks about building stronger connections by reducing judgment and really thinking differently about this word, professionalism, and how we view that in our workplace as well. Now, on my next Bridge the Gap podcast episode, I'm going to take a step back. Look, big picture of your organization, and we're going to talk about priorities and kind of how attractive the organization is to others as well. So, if you're impatient and you want to go ahead and get more retention strategies right now, you can always connect with me on LinkedIn. My name is Cara Silletto, and thanks for listening to this week's Bridge the Gap contributor Wednesday.