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Cara Silletto

Welcome to the Bridge the Gap podcast. I'm your contributor and host, Cara Silletto. If we haven't met yet, I'm the president at Magnet Culture, and I'm the creator of the employee retention ecosystem. If you've been following my Contributor Wednesday episodes this year, you know we've been working our way through that employee retention ecosystem model. We've talked about how today's workforce is no longer made up of deep-rooted oak trees as employees who value stability.

But instead, our workforce today is more like house plants who want mobility. They need individualized care like house plants in order to thrive. And that means managers must adjust as the workforce evolves. If we want to keep that talent that we can't afford to lose, right? So in July, we talked about acclimating our new hires and giving them a smoother, longer on ramp and runway into the organization.

Now, today, we focus on what happens after those first 90 to 100 days. What about the staff who aren't new anymore? How do we cultivate that staff? So today we're looking at that second leader responsibility from within the ecosystem model. We talked about acclimating. Now we're going to focus on cultivating our people. So specifically how must we communicate more effectively.

How can we provide more real time feedback and growth opportunities to keep those existing house plants from quietly wilting right before our eyes? So let's jump into our chat today. I want you to imagine that you are at a bowling alley, okay? We love teaching this lesson in our feedback class. It's a total game changer for some leaders to see this different perspective. All right. So put yourself in the alley. You step up, you roll the ball down the lane. And right before it hits the pins, a heavy big black curtain drops. You hear a crash. You hear the pin scatter. But you have no idea whether you threw a strike or hit just 1 or 2 pins over on the far left.

Listen. Working without feedback, both positive feedback and constructive feedback. It feels exactly like bowling in the dark. Can you imagine? How would you have any idea on your next bowling ball what to do? Would you do the same thing again? Or would you go a little to the left, a little to the right? Would you make an adjustment if you didn't know how it landed and what results you got?

How would you know how to behave moving forward? And maybe it wasn't a great shot, but it sounded good. And so you just do the same thing over and over, not realizing that you're missing the mark. That's what we're talking about. Say feedback. Okay. So let's also think about the evolution of feedback. It used to be. Come on.

Now that no news is good news. And if your boss was asking for a conversation in their office, that was a bad thing, you know? Hey, come talk to me when you've got a minute. That was not good. So the alternative was, if you weren't called into the office, you're doing just fine. You get to keep your job and come back tomorrow and keep doing what you're doing.

Alright, so this is why previous generations of workers just kind of accepted a lack of feedback. They kept their head down, just kept doing what they were doing until somebody told them to change because no news was good news. However, over time, man, has that changed. The workforce started to want feedback constantly. Okay, both a blend of that constructive feedback and positive feedback to know how they're doing along the way.

And remember, they grew up in a different era, a different time than many of us. You know, I'm in my 40s now, and things have changed about how much feedback students even get in school. And they were raised with, you know, stickers and a check plus and things like that as well. Not to mention all of the social media that has come up in their childhood and early adulthood where they started getting the comments and likes and all of that constant feedback on their thoughts and what they're putting out in the world as well.

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All right. Now, most organizations have adopted over the years and within the last few decades, for sure, this idea of annual reviews and performance evaluation annually or sometimes quarterly; some type of feedback is in place on a regular basis for most organizations. And that's better than nothing, but today's workforce. No, no, no, they're not going to wait quarterly.

It's certainly not for the whole year to get some feedback. They are not okay with no news is good news because they will panic and think that you hate them or don't appreciate them or, you know, don't want them there, that type of thing. So they're not going to wait months to find out how they're doing. Today's world is moving too quickly for that.

And so is their brain. You know, they're constantly wondering, okay, well, where am I at? I haven't heard from my boss. I don't even know if I'm doing a good job. I don't even know if she cares that I'm here today. So who? What does it matter if I don't come back tomorrow? Right. That type of thing can start happening within their mindset.

You know, I do a ton of generational work. That's been my secret sauce for over a decade now. And continuous generational reporting over the years, including reports from income and groups like that. It tells us that most Gen Z workers, that group under 30, want multiple check-ins from their manager every week, multiple not once a week, but multiple.

And in fact, some of them say that about 40% of Gen Z folks want daily feedback. Now, we might think that means prepared. Oh, I need to tell them how they're doing and give them mentoring and coaching. No, no. Sometimes it's as simple as just, hey, thanks for being here today. We're doing a great job this morning, or I appreciate that you made it on time today, or hey, I'd like to talk to you about this or that and give you some more training on that.

Right. Just checking in to let them know where they stand is so, so important. These house plans, remember, our new workforce is more like houseplants. They want real-time feedback.

And yes, that does include appreciation for being at work. Okay, not everybody shows up today. In fact, some of my classes, I like to ask, do you have people who don't show up?

And the answer is yes. So why is it so hard for us to thank the people who do, you know? And I ask leaders to dig big, big, deep because I believe we are truly grateful for the people who show up and do the job, because not everybody is doing that today. All right. Now, I know, I know, I get a lot of pushback because they'll say, I'm not going to thank people for showing up.

That's why they get a paycheck. You've probably heard me say that before, and I'm just finding that it's not an effective way to lead right now, thinking that the paycheck is going to do the trick. So real-time feedback does include appreciation to some extent, but it doesn't have to be always positive. And great job, great job, great job.

Right. But our reality as employers is that frontline folks can go just about anywhere today and get a paycheck. So we also need to step up as leaders and organizations to recognize their contributions, make sure they feel seen. They feel heard, they feel valued. Just checking in genuinely with them on a regular basis, right. To give them some of that feedback.

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Now, when I share those statistics of, you know, people want feedback or a connection with you kind of multiple times weekly, if not daily, a lot of my senior care clients, they start to panic, like, wait a minute, time to do that. I don't have time to chat almost every day. Or they say, you know, I'm not even there when a certain incident happens that needs feedback. And I hear about it later, but then I don't know when to address it and how to address it because I wasn't even there. And I just hope it kind of goes away if it's something that needs to be dealt with, for example, because a lot of our leaders today are also, let's be honest, pretty conflict-avoidant.

We have raised a generation of leaders now that does not want to hurt anybody's feelings and does not want to have to deal with a difficult situation and really just doesn't even feel comfortable, doesn't feel they've been equipped and have the tools to do that. So sometimes it's those reasons and, you know, they just they tell me like, I don't I don't know how to deal with the not positive feedback. It's much easier to give the positive feedback versus understanding how to handle the situation. Now I will tell you that the old well remember what they called it like a positivity sandwich. It used to be tell them something positive, then tell them the negative thing and then tell them something positive and that doesn't work anymore. Okay, so when we're talking real time feedback, it's not about, you know, the quarterly and annual performance reviews where you're saying, well, you did this and this and this, well, but not this.

And, and then finishing with something else positive like that. Now, if you do real-time feedback, we're usually only addressing one thing at a time. Right? So it's either something positive or something that needs to be changed or adjusted, fixed, for lack of a better word. And a lot of times I would recommend that folks put it into what benefits that employee. Right? So you will get more respect around here or more collaboration from others here. If you were to adjust your

approach in this way, instead of saying, well, we don't do it here, you know, don't do that again. And kind of reprimanding, but spinning it to what's in it for them to change the way that they've done it.

Now, of course, if we're talking about a compliance issue or a process that has to be followed, that's different. But going to folks and letting them know, hey, love to talk with you about how we're doing that and, and maybe tweak the way that we're going about that to meet compliance needs or the resident needs or whatever that reason is.

Okay. So there are lots of different reasons that some leaders get worried about. Oh, I don't, you know, I can't provide this much feedback. And of course, that first one, "I don't have time tends to rise to the top and be the biggest one. I hear everybody's concerns about being too busy fighting other fires. But if we know that our workforce today needs more guidance and support from us, what happens?

Don't do it. You know, we can say like, oh, I don't have time to check in with people, but if we don't, then we're going to be even busier when they walk out, when they don't show up for their next shift; we're going to get disengaged. Folks who start to say, well, nobody even cares if I'm here. Oftentimes we're seeing more mistakes that we have to clean up or redo.

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If we're not constantly giving that feedback and really helping people advance their competency in the role, we also might end up with, and I've seen this a lot, no pipeline of future leaders who are ready to step up. So often I'm hearing that we don't have the bench strength, right. We don't have people ready to go up into leadership.

And then when I ask about their mentoring and feedback, the companies like, yeah, we we haven't done the best of that of mentoring and giving people feedback and trying to elevate that for them. So sometimes that can come back to bite us later. And of course, ultimately we will lose people. Some people quit because they don't feel that they've gotten any feedback whatsoever, especially the recognition side.

Now, don't get me wrong, daily feedback does not mean you have to sit down for 30 minutes. You know, it can literally be two minutes, as long as it is genuine and specific about what kind of feedback you're person, right? We're going to appreciate the job well done in the moment. Or it may mean pulling someone aside for just one minute to say, hey, I noticed how you handled that residence, family member or I heard about it.

You know, if you weren't there in the moment and great job de-escalating that situation, you know, or if it's more of a destructive criticism, right, then we might say, hey, let's talk for a few minutes about a way that you're doing that process to make sure that we're meeting compliance or meeting the residents needs as well, and talk with them that way, but just one item at a time.

We don't have to pile on to folks, okay? You do have to lift the curtain at the end of the bowling alley so that your team knows exactly which pins did they hit, which pins did they not hit right? Which ones did they miss? And hopefully how to adjust when we show them the results. Also of when we do this.

Here's the result we tend to get versus if we make this tweak and we approach the situation in this other way, we will get a much better outcome in talking in those terms as well. Right? Okay. So that leads us right into the other side of this cultivation piece of responsibility for leaders, okay. And that is creating growth opportunities for staff as well.

So we've got real-time feedback is a big part of the model for leaders and creating some growth opportunities. So if you want your houseplants to root and own their position and then grow within the organization, we have to provide some fertilizer and the space for them to grow as well. So you can kind of think of it as feedback being a fertilizer that helps them take root.

And then the growth opportunities might be that we have to create a space for them, such as a bigger pot. They came into our organization as a nice, you know, little sapling or little littler plant, and we know they want to grow. So we've got to go get a bigger pot to put them in. And sometimes that is easy to do.

You know, there are some linear ways for growth. And sometimes we've got to get much more creative. In fact, within senior living, I often hear, Cara, we don't have much of a ladder for folks to climb unless they want to get another degree. Okay. And you know, I understand you only have one director of nursing, for example. That's okay.

Not all growth for folks' careers is a traditional promotion does not have to be that linear. Now, there are two ways to approach this topic of advancement and growth. My usual conversation is the executive conversation about creating more official career paths. I've worked with several organizations that wanted to create actual paths for staff to change roles, even without having to get another degree.

Okay, so a common one that I've seen and worked with some folks on is creating stair steps or levels for a position such as a CNA, right, or dietary aide, or even a cook or a housekeeper. Those kinds of positions, you can say, all right, they're going to start as a level one CNA, and then they will advance to level two, level three, and beyond based on competencies that they gain, not tenure.

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Like, oh, you've been here six months. You've been here a year. It's more based on how good they are at getting the job done and learning the nuances and complexity of that role over time. All right. So that's kind of the executive conversation when you have the authority to create more levels of growth within a position. But today I'm focusing more on the leader's perspective.

And and what does a leader have the authority over? Because they probably can't create a new position for that. And if they are not executives, they're going to have to advance their staff without a title change and more money. So what does that look like? This idea of cultivating your staff means exploring more creative opportunities, things like micro-mentoring.

Now, I remember back in the day, my mentor would take me out of the office for a long lunch and really pour into me, and ain't nobody got time for that anymore. So now we have to do micro-mentoring when we have a chance, whether that's, you know, five minutes here, 20 minutes there, any interaction that we have with our folks, we want to be leveling them up and pouring into them and teaching them what we know, of course, to create those future leaders.

But we can do micro-mentoring. We can also get creative in advancing their skills, their knowledge, their network within the profession as well, even without an official promotion. So you can play a big role in a person's advancement, quote unquote. Right? I use that word kind of with quotes around advancement. If we just help them find new opportunities to learn and get better, meet more people, that type of growth as well.

Now, of course, everybody wants a title change and more money, but that's not always in the cards. So keep in mind that this phrase, there's no opportunity for advancement is often cited as a reason why people quit, right? If you look back, I'm sure your data, those reports, are going to show you that multiple people in a year marked the box that said, there's no opportunity for advancement here.

So when a team member expresses their desire to learn and grow, ask them what they want. What do they want to learn? How do they want to grow? What else would they like to see around here that could give them some more exposure, more awareness, more training, more learning? Okay. Do they want to meet more people within the company, expanding that network?

Do they have certain aspirations or ideas for their own career path that you can help them reach over time? All right. It's not going to happen immediately. But how can I help you get there? I'll tell you. So many leaders come to me and say, I've been able to keep people who were planning a completely different career path, you know, outside of senior living.

They were going to do something completely different. And I was able to keep them either a long, long time or a lot longer than they were planning on being here, because maybe somebody was just using their job in senior care as a stepping stone for their other degree or another industry they were trying to get into. And a leader who really pours into them and says, hey, I know you're not going to be here forever.

How can I be? You get where you want to get by using this position to learn as well. So it's kind of a win-win in that scenario. Now, some pushback that I get at this point in my training

sessions, if we're talking about advancement, is leaders will push back and say, but Cara, they've been here a month and they're asking for a promotion.

Okay, that's a little bit ridiculous in this leader's eyes. And so what's interesting is I have found that for the new workforce, they believe that they were hired in to kind of learn the job. And after they have learned the job, they're ready for the next step. And so that's how, you know, baby boomers and Gen Xers, all the folks kind of over 45 today.

That's not how they were. They were raised in the work world. It was you come in, you learn the job, and then you stay in that job for a long, long, long time. You kind of master it before, years later, you might be eligible or near ready for that promotion. So it's really a recalibration of timing that we have to think about as leaders.

22:07 - 27:22

Cara Silletto

What is an appropriate tenure and timing for crew promotions, but also even just growth and opportunity? But I'll tell you, you can kind of stall people from quitting if you micro-mentor them, and you just do those little bits of I hear you and hey, here are some ideas; here's another person you can talk to. Here's a learning opportunity.

Those little things can keep them interested enough, almost just like, you know, I teach the carrot on a stick type of mentality, or chopping up a big carrot into little baby carrots. You can also have little opportunities for growth and micro-mentoring, micro-advancement, that type of thing. But I got to tell you a funny story. I am one of the oldest millennials.

You all know I was born in the 80s and at my first job out of college. I'd been there a couple of years, and at 24 years old, one of our vice presidents left. Now this is a small company, only like ten people. So I worked with everybody and a vice president left. And so I went to the president, and I said, I'd like to put my hat in the ring for this VP job.

And the president was so kind, okay, he could have left me out of his office and said, you are ridiculous. Go back to your desk, you know? But he did not laugh. What he did was say, okay, come in here, Cara. And he kind of called me into his office from the doorway, and he said. Sit down. Let's talk about this. Why do you want that job, and what makes you qualified for that job? And I went back and said, well, I looked at the job description, and I feel like I can do this and this and this and this, and I could learn this and this and this pretty quickly. In fact, I had worked across the hall from that VP who left.

And so I felt like, you know, I heard the guy on the phone, and I knew what type of business conversations he was having a lot of the time. So I just thought, I can grow into this; I can step into it. I know I'm not like, already qualified, but I think I can get there. And what was interesting is the boss said, I don't think you're qualified yet, but here's exactly why.

And he was kind enough. You know, he was direct, but kind enough to say you need a bigger social network within the industry. To be successful in this job, you need to understand the internal company politics and even industry politics of what's going on, of who works with whom and how do we get things done. You know, the regulatory, the reimbursement side of the business.

I needed to better understand some of those things. And what was cool is he said, I, I know you're ready for growth, and I would love to see you grow into those kind of positions here, but you've got to fill these gaps first and hit these stepping stones on your way to get there. So he introduced me to some industry magazines and publications.

You know, now we've got podcasts like this one, you know, do you have a mentee that you could tell about the Bridge the Gap podcast, who might want to be a future leader in this profession? And this would be a really great resource for them. Right. So my boss gave me all these resources and people to meet. He explained the situation that I didn't know, right?

There were parts of the job that I didn't know because they weren't in black and white on the job description. So his explanation, his mentoring, his acknowledgment that I wanted to grow and was capable of growing it was enough to keep me there for five years. You all I stayed five years and I'm a millennial who wanted to hop.

Okay, I totally would have bailed. I would have jumped ship if he had not said, I am going to help you grow and help you get there. So I did get promoted into a different position about a year later. That was a much better fit for me and more I was more qualified for. And so I just bring this up because some folks just want to know that you hear their desires, that you see a vision for them, that you see their potential and that they're not stuck.

You know, from their perspective that they're not stuck in that one job forever or at that one level, even if it's on to stay in that type of job, that they can still advance. In fact, my boss, something else he told me in that exchange, he said, look, you know, your first year I expect you to kind of get your feet under you and figure out the job.

Then the next year, I expect folks to really kind of own it and make it better and, you know, really take hold, get faster, get more effective in the job. And then in your third year, maybe even going on your fourth year, I want you to elevate the job. I want you to master the job. And that challenge alone was really exciting because here I was feeling a little bored, like, oh, I know how to do the job, so I'm done.

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This is all I can get out of this. And he said, no, there's so much more that you could do and could learn even within that one position. And because he pointed that out to me and talked through it with me, it made me see more opportunity to grow and to advance even within that one specific position. Okay.

So sometimes we just have to have those conversations with our folks, and you'd be shocked how much longer they can stay when they see that investment in them as well. Now, some more specific advancement ideas that I've heard and seen along the way, of course, just want to remind you some basics of cross training and any special certifications.

Of course, in a lot of states you can do like dementia certifications for CNAs, or maybe even make them a medication aide or different positions like that. I see more companies bringing back the assistant don position, or adding that adding in a retention specialist onto their HR team. That's a great position for a really ambitious, well connected person from your staff to move into and help be the ambassador for onboarding and new hires coming in.

You know, speaking of ambassador, no matter the position, sometimes you can make that person an ambassador or a mentor for the department and say, hey, you get to mentor the new hires that have come in. Of course, people sometimes want a mentor or 2 or 3. You know, it doesn't have to be official, but introducing them to folks who can also pour into them is great.

Sometimes they just want to work on a special project, or maybe join a company committee for an external committee. Some sometimes leaders are on committees and they don't really want to be that committee. So can we delegate that out to someone who is more up and coming in a leadership role? Also think about can your folks attend a conference and even just a webinar?

Can they go and get some official learning as well without having to get another degree? Not everybody has the time, the money, the interest to do that. But a lot of people do want to learn. And even at the CNA level, the nursing level, other positions around the organization, there are conferences out there and events for clinical teams at all levels and for future leaders.

Think about those programs in your town and your city, your county, your state for future leaders that they might be able to tap into as well. So when you balance real time feedback with personalized opportunities for your team to expand their skills for your staff, this is going to help them to stop feeling so stagnant in the role.

They're going to see themselves staying with the organization longer. They realize at that point that you see their potential and that you're actively investing in their future, whether it's long term with you or not. You know, I even know of some other companies. I, I know somebody who runs several of the Jiffy Lube kind of franchise locations. And he tells people as soon as they come in that I want you to get another job, but I want you to have as much fun and learn as much as you can while you're here.

And I'm going to help you to get a different or, quote unquote, better job, you know, down the road, because I know this isn't where you want to stay forever, but we do expect a 100% from you while you're here. And then we are going to pour into you. And he he has so much attraction of talent. It's amazing.

People tell their friends like, oh, well, go work at that Jiffy Lube down the street because he's just going to pour into you and mentor you and and really help you along. So he gets this incredible talent that stays much longer than other hourly positions. And then, of course, they stay in touch and they send their friends for the next round of hiring, which is awesome.

So don't just think about their career within senior care. Although I've also seen people who said this is just a stepping stone, and then 25 years later, they're they're still working in our field, which I love. So it can happen. We can we can potentially keep them if we get creative and they fall in love with what it is that we do and who we serve, just like I have fallen in love with that.

So remember retention as we talk about all these different pieces acclimating, cultivating leaders roles, executive roles. You know, retention is a multi piece, multi-person, holistic guzzle. It takes executives, it takes the leaders at every level. And it takes the staff all playing their proper roles within that employee retention ecosystem to create a place where everybody can thrive. You know, if you stop making your staff bowl in the dark and start giving them more real time feedback and growth opportunities that many of them are craving today, you are going to see that revolving door slow down, all right?

You're going to see people stay longer because they know you care about them. So if you haven't yet, I highly recommend that you go and check out our hidden treasure trove of retention resources at [MagnetVault.com](https://magnetvault.com). That's Magnet Vault like a bank vault. In that vault, we have our employee Retention ecosystem audit tool where you can see how you stand today.

You know, where do you stand on all these different roles of feedback and guidance, you know, onboarding, compensation, all of those different areas, along with in the vault, there's a million other resources that are downloadable and sharable for you and your leadership team as well. Now, on my next Bridge the Gap podcast episode, we're going to wrap up my Contributor Wednesday series for the year, and I will be giving some final takeaways to share.

But until then, if you want to keep learning more retention strategies now, you don't want to wait for next month. You can connect with me on LinkedIn and subscribe to our YouTube page. And thanks for listening to this week's Bridge the Gap. Now get out there and water your plants.