

8 tips to re-energising your team after letting go of staff

By  Jeff Lomey

18 Aug 2021

If a company has had to let staff go for whatever reason, how do they reallocate team members to do the same work with fewer hands on deck? How do they approach staff about having to do more with less? How do they manage small teams to get effective output while still preserving their sanity? How do you compensate employees for the extra work and hours if you can't pay them more?



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Purge your own emotions, let logic prevail

When a team has let go of staff, the emotions experienced are the same as for an individual losing a good friend, partner or loved one. Adaptive leaders aim to accept the loss as fast as possible by dealing with their own emotions, mental health and negative energy first. Only then will full energy be free to deal with the new challenge of reaching the same or higher targets with less resources and negative emotional energy in the team.

Tip: Talk to someone you trust about your feelings and concerns as a leader. Perhaps an outsider to the company. Get help from a professional if you are unable to cope alone. Focus on your own mental health.

Maintain empathy and high EQ

The most healthy way to start again is as a completely new team. It is in fact a new team because of the change in output required, roles, workload, relationships, skill application, work hours and stress levels. Everything changed. Trust with management and even co-workers is extremely low. Energy is way down. The team must deal with its emotional loss of colleagues in their team and also other teams they interact with. Chances are the letting go also affected other work teams in the environment. In order to start again, the team deals first with the emotional losses, fears and concerns. The team's emotional and mental health.

Tip: Most successful way to start again is to open up the discussion on what the members feel about the loss. Explore the emotions and concerns. Just listen and empathise. This can be done one-on-one or, even better, in the team meetings. Get an experienced facilitator if required. The team can set tasks which lead to mutual support for dealing with the loss. Close the meeting. Offer one-on-one sessions for those who may require it.

Renew the team mandate, focus and resource use

In this stage, high structure is required by the leader. Team members want to be told what to do. After the emotions have been cleared out as far as possible, the minds and hearts will be more prepared to face conversations about the work required. Now the leader and team are ready to start on the work and answer the questions set out in paragraph one.

Tip: Set an agenda to cover the scope of work for the unit as a whole. The leader sets out again or reviews what is required, why it is required and by when. The team can identify new opportunities and challenges given the new situation. List the main team outputs and what measures are required for success.

Tip: Discuss how to break the work up into pieces which can be allocated to the remaining resources in the team. Draw up a comprehensive matrix of members skills. Find the skills that team members have hidden or have not used recently. Let the team match the skills to the outputs required. Talk about learning goals. Which outputs would the team members want to work on to increase their skills levels. Figure out a measurement dashboard.

Building mutual trust stage

The team sets out towards reaching the outputs agreed in the renewal stage. This trust building stage is characterised by the members voicing their opinion and settling into the new pecking order. Conflict arises as jobs are assigned and members get a sense of who has control and power. There is also a sense of excitement about new possibilities. If the team can learn how to deal with conflict in a healthy way, then success is close by.

Tip: Educate the team about conflict resolution. Give reading material. Bring in a speaker. Measure the team results by showing outputs and indicators. Show that success is close or far. How does the conflict affect the results? What healthy compromises and solutions emerged from the conflict?

Stuck in conflict

Some teams don't get out of this stage. Leaders and teams require a high EQ and to be non-judgmental and keep focus on the work while at the same time allowing people to express their views openly.

Tip: Leader has an open door policy but directs decision-making and professional behaviour. Step in to guide the team gently and firmly. Be aware of underlying team dynamics. Note that resolving conflict usually results in more intimacy and then cooperation. This drives the team to perform better.

Reaching the goals

At this point the team members take responsibility and work toward the team's success. They can handle each other's different personalities and their individual idiosyncrasies. They start to build a shared skills base and everybody can do a little bit of everyone else's job.

Tip: Performance improvement sessions are often held to boost performance to a very high level. The leader is often seen as a contributing team member. The role of the leader switches to strategy and bringing information from higher up so that the team can process it and work towards it.

A healthy team performing well

It is time for the leader to change from directive mode to more participative mode. The team is mature with reasonable trust. Motivation and knowledge are higher. Members have improved skill levels and out levels. They can make decisions without much supervision. Conflict occurs and is channelled in a healthy way towards creativity and more output.

Tip: Hold performance improvement masterclasses, creative brainstorming sessions and bring in experts to grow skills and knowledge.

In conclusion

Teams often cycle through such a renewal process as described above. Extremely mature teams can do it on the fly. Even the most high-performing teams will revert to earlier stages in certain circumstances, like a change in leadership, organisation structure or another downsizing.

ABOUT JEFF LOMEY

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