Introduction

75 percent of people who leave their jobs do so because of their relationship with their boss or their leadership (Sakyiama, 2015). Where do they go? To your competition!

The purpose of skip-level meetings is to provide an opportunity to gain unfiltered perspectives from colleagues about particular topics. The leader creates a solid foundation of trust by allowing for open and honest dialogue. Valuable feedback on new initiatives, colleague motivators, process improvement strategies, professional development needs and mentoring opportunities are possible outcomes of developing stronger relationships with team members.

Results

The goal of skip-level meetings is to increase engagement, establish trust and improve communication between leaders and their direct reports’ team members.

Results include:
1. Creating a solid foundation of trust
2. Building deeper relationships and understanding
3. Ensuring open lines of communication

In describing the goals and benefits of skip-level meetings, it is also important to recognize areas to avoid. Discussions related to the manager’s performance, venting frustrations about colleagues and their manager and probing for problems are not the intent of skip-level meetings.

It’s important to remember that managers may feel threatened by this process. Open the door for the manager to discuss questions/concerns with you and reconfirm your purpose. You are encouraged to share with them the questions you plan to ask.

Keep information confidential, and take action wherever required.

Learning Objectives

1. The learner will be able to describe the purpose, value and benefits of conducting skip-level meetings
2. The learner will be able to implement the six-step process in leading skip-level meetings
3. The learner will identify differences between the two types of skip-level meetings – one-on-one and group

How to Conduct a Skip-Level Meeting

There are two types of skip-level meetings: leader/colleague meetings and leader/team meetings. The type of meeting conducted varies with the outcome and benefit the leader plans to achieve.

Leader/colleague meetings are best implemented when the goal is to know colleagues and their individual’s perspectives.

Leader/team meetings are best planned to understand how a team functions and challenges the team is experiencing.

In conducting both leader/colleague and leader/team meetings, a six-step process is used to ensure a productive, beneficial skip-level meeting.

1. Communicate to the manager your interest in facilitating the skip-level meeting and your purpose. Schedule the meeting 1-2 weeks in advance for 30 min.
2. When creating the agenda and topics.
3. Be supportive and patient. Motivate your team member to open up and share their views and ideas.
4. Be a good listener. Always ask open-ended questions Talk less and provoke your team member to talk more.
5. Capture new ideas, unanswered questions and important problems that surface but cannot be addressed during the meeting.
6. Follow-up. Managers will be very interested to learn about how the meetings went, so be sure to follow up in your next one-on-one and categorize the feedback in such a way that it is helpful, including themes, without indicating who said what.

Conclusions

Retaining employees is an investment of leadership time, but loosing employees is costly to the institution. According to Bloomberg, $11 billion is lost annually due to employee turnover, and cost of replacing high-level or highly specialized employees can be up to 400 percent of their annual salary.

Because you have one skip-level meeting with an employee, does not mean you have totally met your goal. To continue the trusting relationship, skip-level meeting should be scheduled with each employee 2-3 times annually.

The honest and open dialogue that occurs as a result of skip-level meetings can greatly accelerate a team’s productivity. Skip-level meetings should be implemented as a standard leadership strategy.

Conclusions
