Dallas Business Journal **Conversations**

Views and opinions from Dallas Business Journal and the North Texas business community

How to start new year off right with employees

Business leaders can resolve to improve their social interactions with direct reports whether in or outside the office.

GUEST VIEW

Sherri Elliott-Yeary

Unlike the workplace of the past, 21st century companies have come to understand that taking care of the whole employee is good for business and morale.

No longer do employees expect to drop their personal lives at the door to become happy little cogs in the corporate machine, satisfied to take home a paycheck in exchange for their time on the job.

Rather, they expect benefits that address their overall well-being, including daycare resources, wellness programs, flexible work schedules and sabbaticals.

The workforce of the future expects genuine and authentic relationships with managers and colleagues that provide meaningful connections both inside and outside of the office.

Here are few tips on how managers can interact personally with members of their team while remaining professional.

Talk about leisure activities. Allow a brief amount of time in team meetings and/or events for everyone to share something personal if they choose to, such as what they did over the weekend. This serves as a great connection point into each other's lives without being invasive.

Schedule consistent one-on-ones with employees. If all employees know they have designated time with their leader, it will alleviate any potential fears of favoritism they may harbor when leaders appear to only meet with certain people and never find the time for others.

Express genuine interest in the significant events of your employees' lives. Leaders can get to know their employees' family, hobbies and personal aspirations. By supporting them in these aspects, it can improve their commitment to their leader as well as the organization in good times and bad.

Host off-site events. These outings allow the team an opportunity to get to know each other outside of the workplace. Creating strong friendships within the team is a proven indicator of higher retention and increased morale.

Connect via social media. When it comes to social media, leaders can consider following their direct reports on Twitter and connecting with them on LinkedIn. Facebook is a much more personal platform, and it could make for an awkward situation should they prefer to keep it private.

Overall, managers shouldn't shy away from the conversation or avoid engaging in meaningful dialogue that fosters deep connections with employees.

After all, a leader can be an employee's primary source of inspiration and motivation, and that cannot be achieved at arms' length.

Sherri Elliott-Yeary is president of Human Capital Solutions and author of "Ties to Tattoos: Turning Generational Differences into a Competitive Edge."