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Resignation

The most important step a leader can take to meet employees where their values are is to establish a culture of trust and empowerment. I only have to look at my own career to see how much this impacts employee and company performance.

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By Josh Cyphers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a lot of trends, including the trend of people quitting their jobs.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics [reports](#) that nearly four million Americans quit their jobs in July—for the fourth month in a row. In the same month, job openings rose to

a record high. According to a Microsoft [survey](#) released in June, 41% of US workers

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with their employers where they are recognized as people, not just workers.”

Creating a growth culture

The most important step a leader can take to meet employees where their values are is to establish a culture of trust and empowerment. I only have to look at my own career to see how much this impacts employee and company performance.

I've worked in organizations where there was trust and empowerment. I wanted to come to work every day, to work hard and do my best. I felt valued, and empowered to solve problems and bring new ideas to the table.

I've worked in environments where trust and empowerment were lacking. I wasn't excited to get into work. I dreaded each meeting, each conversation, and eventually, the entire day. I kept my head down, and my mouth shut, and ultimately, I left.

A tale of two companies

It's great to have personally experienced that culture, but how do trust and empowerment, or the lack thereof, impact an entire company?

Here's the best illustration I can give you: I worked at two companies that were both at \$8 million in revenue when I started. In one company, we cultivated an environment of trust and empowerment, a “growth culture”, and we grew to \$65 million in a few years' time. In the second company, there wasn't a lot of trust and empowerment, and when I left after a few years, the company had hardly grown at all.

There are always business rationalizations and market justifications for why a company grows or doesn't. In my experience, what it comes down to is having a group of people who care about one another and the customers they serve, who trust

each other, and can pull together during difficult times. That cohesive energy stems

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- People listen to each other and ask for each other's opinions.
- Ideas can come from anyone, no matter where they sit in the organization or how long they've been there.
- People have autonomy over how they reach their goals and KPIs.
- Leaders support and encourage testing new ideas and taking on stretch assignments.
- People collaborate cross-functionally.
- Failure is embraced and shared, not condemned and avoided.

It all adds up to what's referred to as a “**growth mindset**.”

When I've worked in companies with a growth mindset, it seemed to me that people felt like what they did mattered. Job descriptions were broad and tied to outcomes, not tasks. If they saw something broken or raised an issue, leadership listened and wanted to know how the situation could be improved. They were interested in evolving as a company, and people grew and evolved too.

In one such company, I came in as an entry-level analyst. Before I knew it, I was influencing product and corporate strategy, how sales teams were structured and where we made investments in the company. I soon stepped into a leadership role.

The contrast to that is a “fixed mindset” culture. Here's what I've experienced in that type of environment:

- Decisions are handed down from the top.
- Execution is micromanaged.
- People fear questioning things or disagreeing with the group.
- New ideas are met with silence, or dismissed without consideration.
- ‘The way we've always done it’ is unquestioned.
- Mistakes result in finger-pointing.

- No one wants to risk trying new things for fear of failing.

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This is not just a big company vs. small company issue. One of the most empowering places I've ever worked is one of the biggest companies in the world. One of the worst was a small company where the leader would scream and yell and talk about people behind their backs. No one felt safe.

Big companies that want to [continue to innovate intentionally](#) invest in things like incubation centers or hack-a-thons, not necessarily because they're demanding specific profitability performance but because they're trying to foster the creation of new ideas, and they don't hold an expectation of performance. They hold an expectation of evolution, growth and collaboration.

In a small company, innovation is even easier. If you set the right tone, innovation is what everybody does naturally. There's so much flexibility in the direction of a smaller company and there's a greater ability to say, "Hey, why don't we try this?" and go for it.

Communicating value

What all of this comes down to is how you value your employees. Money alone is not the answer. Money typically isn't even the primary factor in how employees feel about the place they work. Feeling empowered to contribute to the best of their ability, and having their contributions valued, matter more than paycheck or title to many employees.

The value you place on your employees as people is communicated every day, from the top down. It's communicated by listening to opinions and ideas, trusting people to make decisions, and [clearing the runway for them to thrive](#). It's shown in removing the obstacles to let people go beyond what they're doing today, and then giving them the opportunity to push themselves further and try new things.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a time for people to re-evaluate their relationships

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