

Episode #162: Navigating Employee Types: Strategies for Stayers, Players, Slayers, and Glaciers



Full Episode Transcript

**With Your Host
Dr. Janel Anderson**

Episode 162: Navigating Employee Types: Strategies for Stayers, Players, Slayers, and Glaciers

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Working Conversations podcast where we talk all things leadership, business, communication and trends in organizational life. I'm your host, Dr. Janel Anderson.

Regardless of whether you are managing the work of others or observing the dynamics unfolding around you at work, you know that people have different levels of motivation and engagement.

In today's episode, we are unraveling the enigma of employee types and how to best manage them, delving into the art of leading diverse personalities towards collective productivity and organizational growth, from the steadfast stayers to the adventurous players, the innovative slayers and the elusive glaciers.

Each employee type presents a unique challenge and opportunity for managers, so grab a pen and paper and be ready to take some notes as we uncover the secrets to effectively managing a diverse workforce and fostering a culture of engagement, innovation, and success.

Welcome to The Ultimate Guide on managing different types of employees in today's dynamic workplace. Effective management involves understanding and catering to the diverse needs of motivations of employees, from those committed to the long haul to others seeking valuable experience before moving on rapidly.

Each employee type requires a tailored approach to maximize their potential and contribution to the organization. Let's explore some tips on how to best manage each of these distinct employee types, the stayers, the players, the slayers and the glaciers.

The stayers are your employees who are committed for the long term. They probably want to retire from your organization. The players are the employees who are seeking valuable experience before bouncing off to the next thing. The slayers are the employees who are always looking to improve or innovate. They've always got a new idea they're working and the glaciers, these are the employees who are not putting forth much effort and, quite frankly, are not very engaged.

Now, I'm always a fan of a good two by two matrix. If you want to plot these four types in a two by two matrix. You're going to look at it this way. First, you've got engagement,

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employee engagement, across the x axis, the horizontal plane, and you've got upward mobility on the y axis, the vertical plane.

In the bottom left corner, you've got the glaciers, low engagement, low mobility. In the bottom right hand corner, you've got the stayers, higher engagement, but low mobility. They're not looking to climb the corporate ladder. In the upper left you've got the players, low engagement, because they're not going to stick around that long and high mobility. And then in the upper right hand corner, that's where you've got the slayers, the ones with high mobility and high engagement and lots of new ideas.

All right, we're going to start with the stayers, the employees who are committed for the long term. So stayers are the backbone of your organization. They provide stability and continuity while contributing their skills and their expertise over years, years and years, maybe even decades. If you've got some stayers on your team, and I sure hope you do, because we again, need that stability and continuity. Here are some tips for managing them well and keeping them around for the long haul:

First, foster a sense of belonging. Create a positive work culture where stayers feel valued, where they feel appreciated, and they feel connected to what your team is doing as well as connected to what the larger organization is doing. For these folks, you want to include some team building activities. You want to recognize their contributions and provide opportunities for professional development and growth within the organization, knowing that that will also help make them feel valued.

Secondly, for this group, you want to set clear career paths, engage in open communication with them about their career goals and their aspirations, knowing that they might not want to be climbing the career ladder and becoming a senior vice president anytime soon, but at the same time, they don't want to stagnate.

So you'll need to find a balance there to provide some guidance and support and helping them map out a career path within the company, offering some opportunities for advancement for those who want it, maybe some additional responsibilities, stretch assignments and the like, as well as that skill development to keep them motivated and keep them feeling fulfilled in their roles, because in order for them to stay it can't be exactly the same thing day in and day out, they need to feel some sense of career progression and building their skill sets.

And then third, for this group, cultivate trust and transparency. So you have to build trust with these folks. They need to feel that there is a two way street of trust. So you want to involve the stayers in some of your decision making, keep them informed about what's

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going on in the organization, and get feedback from them, as well as ideas for improvement.

Now, they're not going to have maybe as many ideas as the slayers, who we'll talk about a little bit later on, but they are going to have some ideas, especially as you think about their longitudinal support of the organization. They've been around a long time. They have a lot of tenure with the organization, and that is going to put them in a position where they are going to see opportunities for improvement. So even though they might not be the most innovative ones on your team, they still do have ideas, and they want those ideas to be heard.

Now, there's a couple of things to watch out for with your stayers. The first is a risk of complacency. So stayers may become complacent in their roles. They also might resist change and innovation due to their long standing loyalty to the company and just liking things to be the same, and this can hinder the organization's ability to adapt to new market trends and technologies.

And as you know from listening to this podcast, we're always in a state of change and a state of flux, so there is a certain risk of complacency that comes with your stayers also limited career growth. So stayers may feel stagnant in their roles if they perceive limited opportunities for career advancement within the organization. Again, these folks are probably not going to be your senior vice presidents or your senior leadership team, at least not anytime soon.

But we also need to make sure that they are not stagnating, because this will lead to decreased motivation, and it may then also lead to retention issues over time. They might not end up being your stayers if they don't get some career development along the way. All right, so those are your stayers. Now the bottom line with stayers, they are the bedrock, the foundation of your team. But because they're not always remarkable, you might overlook them. So remember to acknowledge them for their stability and what they bring to the team and to the work itself. They need to be appreciated for the value that they are bringing to the organization.

All right, let's move on to the players. The players, again, if we're putting them on a two by two matrix, these are in the upper left hand quadrant. They are going to move from job to job quickly. They are ambitious, and they are seeking to gain valuable experience and skills for transitioning to new opportunities elsewhere. Those new opportunities might be within your organization, or those new opportunities might be at other companies or organizations.

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So here are a few tips for effectively managing your players. First, provide challenging assignments. Offer players stretch assignments and challenging work and projects that are going to allow them to stretch the skills that they have and get new experiences. Provide opportunities for growth for these folks, and development opportunities so they can learn new skills encourage them to take on leadership roles, whether those be project leadership roles or more formal leadership roles.

You'll also want to see if you can find ways that they can mentor others and contribute innovative ideas that are going to drive organizational success across the organization, maybe not even just in your team, but more broadly across the organization. Now you know that these folks aren't going to stick around for the long haul, so what you want to do is you make sure that they get as much out of the experience with your organization and on your team as they possibly can.

So the second tip for them is to offer learning opportunities, support the players professional development by offering access to training, to workshops, certifications, anything really that can enhance their skills and their competencies, encourage them to pursue new challenges and experiences again, within the company and within the broader industry, while you're also supporting their aspirations for career advancement outside the organization or laterally within the organization, sometimes it's going to be over and up instead of up, because up would probably be your job.

Now, a third thing you want to do for your players is to help them build a strong network, when players are building a strong professional network, both within the organization and outside the organization, that is going to help them, probably more than just about anything. So connect them with mentors, industry experts and other, quite frankly, potential employers.

Facilitate networking events allow them to go to conferences and seminars where they can bring back valuable knowledge to your team, while also expanding their contacts and exploring future career opportunities. So there's a couple of things to watch out for when managing players.

First of all, if you have too many players on your team, it's going to result in high turnover. So players just naturally, are going to have a shorter tenure, either with your team or with the whole company, leading to higher turnover rates and increased recruitment costs. Because anytime somebody leaves, it does cost something to backfill and get that backfilled person trained up. So this constant influx and outflux of talent can really disrupt team dynamics and project continuity. So you do want to be mindful of that. You don't want to have too many players on your team at the same time. Another

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thing that players get a bad rap for is a lack of commitment to the organization or to your team. So players may be perceived as less committed to the organization's long term goals and values, and that's going to be felt more by the stayers on the team. The ones we were just talking about, the stayers are going to feel jaded by the players.

So you do want to really be thinking about that balance and helping the stayers understand the players having a high priority on their career advancement over loyalty to the company. So again, this could impact team cohesion and team morale. Now the bottom line here with the players, embrace these folks and meet them where they're at.

Be the best possible manager you can be for them right now and be confident that when they move on, which they will share with others what an amazing manager you were and how you helped them in their career development, that is going to reflect well on you, and it's going to have people clamoring to come and work for you in the future. Because remember, the players are going to be out there, and if they are singing your praises, that is going to be attracting new folks to your team.

All right, let's next talk about the slayers. These are the employees who are always looking to improve and innovate. If we're plotting them on a two by two matrix, this is your upper right hand quadrant. Slayers are driven by a passion for improvements and innovation. They are constantly seeking out ways to enhance processes, products and services within the company, and even the processes that get those products and services out into the marketplace. So if you've got slayers on your team, and I hope you have some, here are a handful of tips to help manage the slayers.

First, encourage that creativity, and first encourage that creativity and experimentation the slayers do not want to be held back. So create a culture of innovation where slayers feel empowered to experiment, to take risks and to explore new ideas without the fear of failure. Because, quite frankly, we all know that not every idea is going to work out. So provide resources and support and recognition of their innovative efforts, encouraging them to think outside the box and push the boundaries of what's possible.

Second for the slayers, foster collaboration and cross functional teams, because the best ideas are not necessarily going to come just from within your team. So you want to encourage slayers to collaborate with colleagues from different departments and disciplines. That's really what's going to leverage the diverse perspectives and expertise that they can bring to the work they're doing. So facilitate those cross functional teams, facilitate introductions of your slayers to people outside of their discipline within your organization, and you might also encourage them to have brainstorming sessions where the slayers can engage with ideas and problem solving and driving creative solutions to

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complex challenges, again, across disciplines, this is what is going to keep slayers excited, and it's also going to keep their brain coming up with new ideas.

Now third, for your slayers, recognize and reward that inner innovation. Acknowledge and reward slayers for their contributions to continuous improvement and innovation and new ideas, whether that's through formal recognition programs or maybe incentives if your organization has them, or opportunities for career advancement, stretch assignments and the like. So celebrate those successes and milestones, because that will help reinforce a culture that shows the slayers that you value creativity, curiosity and forward thinking, because ideally you want the slayers to stick around and stay with your team for a good long while, and when they are acknowledged for their contributions, they are that much more likely to stick around for the longer haul.

All right now there's a couple of things to be aware of, a couple downsides, and things you're going to need to be really focused on, so that the slayers do stick around and are not feeling unappreciated.

So first, with slayers, and really with the whole team. Slayers while, of course, innovative, they may encounter resistance from colleagues or managers or even people outside of your immediate work area who are hesitant to adopt new ideas and new processes. So overcomes resistance and gaining buy in for innovative initiatives can be a significant challenge for your slayers. So this requires you to help slayers understand that not everybody is like them, and it also requires you to work across the organization to make sure that there is space for slayers to be understood.

Secondly, manage expectations. Slayers may have high expectations of themselves and of others, and this can lead to frustration if their ideas are not immediately implemented or adopted, or if things aren't moving as quickly or as success, or if things aren't moving as quickly or as successfully as they are hoping for. So manage these expectations while maintaining morale and motivation is going to be key with your slayers bottom line with slayers, balance is needed.

You can't have a full team of slayers, or there will be no stability. So offer plenty of support to the slayers so that they can continue to innovate, and offer plenty of support to others as well, so they don't get frustrated with the change that the slayers are working so hard to create.

All right now we have the bottom left hand corner left are glaciers. These are employees who are not putting forth much effort, and they are not very engaged. So glaciers are employees who lack motivation and engagement. They're coasting through their roles

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without much effort or commitment. Maybe you inherited them. Maybe they're getting ready to retire. Maybe they have quietly quit as we've talked about on this podcast before, or maybe they've just never really been performance managed.

So here are a handful of tips for effectively manage glaciers. First, provide clarity and expectations. Communicate clearly the performance expectations, the goals and the specific objectives you need to do this with the glaciers. You need to outline the importance of their role in contributing to the organization's success, and you need to be really specific about it, especially in areas where they are not carrying their weight. So set achievable targets and milestones, provide regular feedback for these folks and coach them to help them improve their performance and their level of engagement. There's lots of reasons why they might not be performing at their highest level, so you do need to coach them and get at it very, very specifically.

Number two, address underlying issues. Now, as you think issues, I want you to remember that at one time these glaciers were performing. They got hired into your organization, and for a reason. So there's something that's getting in the way of them performing at their best. So as you address underlying issues, take a proactive approach to understand what those underlying issues might be that are contributing to the glaciers lack of motivation and engagement, whether that's dissatisfaction with their role, maybe it's conflicts with colleagues, or maybe it's some personal challenges that are happening outside of work that you wouldn't even necessarily know about.

So encourage open and honest communication with the glaciers and work together to find solutions that are going to support their growth and success, because we want to get these glaciers into that role of stayers where they are contributing they are right now, now.

Third, offer support and resources so identify any barriers or challenges that might be impacting the glaciers, motivation and engagement again, that was through underlying those underlying issues, and then offer support and resources to help them address those issues. Now that could be things like training, mentoring and coaching, if it's something related to their skill development or their confidence levels, and it might also be something outside of that.

It might be counseling or encouraging them to use your employee assistance program if they've got stuff happening in their broader life, or maybe they're experiencing some burnout or something close to that. So offer those opportunities for both the career development side of it as well as what might be happening in their personal life. You may need to coach them into a better fitting role as well, or you might need to coach

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them right out of the organization entirely.

And again, I will refer to the episode we did on quiet quitting and why coaching somebody out of the organization sometimes is a better choice for the underperforming employee. And we'll link that episode up in the show notes.

Now, as you think about your glaciers, what could go wrong? Well, plenty. First of all, we've got low productivity, so glaciers may struggle to meet performance expectations and deadlines due to their lack of motivation, due to their lack of engagement, and this can impact the whole team's productivity. It can also impact project outcomes and deadlines, so this can lead to missed opportunities for the whole team and decreased performance and morale for everyone.

Also there could be a negative impact on the overall team. So a glacier's lack of effort and engagement can have a demoralizing effect on the whole team, that can lead to resentment and frustration among other team members who might feel burdened by having to pick up the slack of their glacier, and this is going to erode trust and collaboration within the team, and I might also say trust in you.

The bottom line here, if you've got glaciers and you're not effectively performance managing and dealing with the glaciers, it will have a negative impact on not only the team as a whole, but on how you are perceived as a leader and manager. Because you know, who knows that you're not dealing with the glaciers everyone else on your team.

That's right, everyone else on your team knows, so make sure you deal with them. If you need to go back and re listen to the episode on holding difficult conversations, or any of the performance management episodes we've done here on the podcast, please go do so okay, my friends, indeed, it does take all kinds of people to make the world go round and make your organization go round and at work, you've got the stayers, the players, the slayers and the glaciers. Effective management involves recognizing and accommodating the diverse needs and motivations of everyone on the team by adapting a tailored approach to managing each employee and fostering a culture of support, collaboration and continuous improvement. You can maximize employee engagement, productivity and retention, ultimately driving long term success and growth, not only in your team, but in your broader organization.

Remember, the future of work is not only about technology, it's about the values we uphold, the communities we build, and the sustainable growth we all strive for. We need to keep exploring, keep innovating and keep envisioning the remarkable possibilities that lie ahead as always, stay curious, stay informed and stay ahead of the curve.

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Tune in next week for another insightful exploration of the trends shaping our professional world. Until then, my friends be well.