the ThreatLab
Integrating Research Into Practice

21ST CENTURY MANAGER'S FIELD GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE LOYALTY

Guidebook & Employee Career Stage Cards

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INTRODUCTION

Employees who are loyal and committed to an organization can support, protect, and represent the organization positively even during difficult times. Managers have an important role to play in building loyalty and commitment by creating and maintaining positive and supportive connections with their employees. To support the development and maintenance of these connections, the Threat Lab developed this guidebook and a set of Employee Career Stage cards that provide information about employee characteristics and needs as well as management strategies tailored to employee career stages.

This guidebook pulls together evidence-based strategies to assist managers in promoting loyalty and commitment. These strategies are practical, easy to apply, and designed to help managers create positive perceptions about working for the organization. The five strategies presented here focus on factors important to employees and help managers:

- **Promote and demonstrate the organization's mission**
- **Foster employee well-being**
- **Highlight employee benefits**
- **Focus on capabilities and career stage factors rather than employee age**
- **Initiate positive out-processing practices**

Both the guidebook and Career Stage Cards are designed to help managers inspire their employees' loyalty and commitment to high-quality performance, teamwork, and organizational success. Although both tools help managers better understand their employee's needs, the guidebook provides more in-depth information on strategies while the Career Stage Cards are a quick snapshot of each career stage. The guidebook and the Employee Career Stage Cards are designed to be used independently of one another, however using them together reinforces the content.

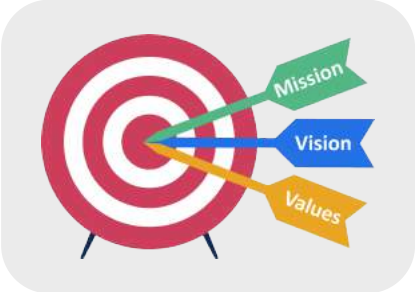
This guidebook is a beta version; it is available as an initial tool and may undergo future development. In order to be effective, the guidebook and the Career Stage Cards work best when they reference a specific audience and policy. For this beta version, both the guidebook and Career Stage Cards specifically reference the DoD civilian workforce as a target audience. The ideas they present, however, are more broadly applicable and useful to other organizations as well.

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

Promote and Demonstrate the Organization's Mission

Your organization's mission reflects its overall function and purpose and answers the question, "What does your organization want to accomplish?".[1] Employees care about whether their organization has a clear and meaningful mission. In general, the goal of government work is to benefit taxpayers in accordance with the organization's goals. More specifically, DoD's principles of honor, duty, and integrity, in conjunction with its defense mission, allows it to achieve positive goals that enhance an employee's potential to have both local and global impacts whether working on the front lines or in support roles.[2,3]

Employees feel a sense of ownership when they can take the mission of the organization as a motto that they, too, can live by. Although using the overarching DoD principles is effective, incorporating department- and unit-specific principles into your mission can further promote your employees' loyalty and commitment. The following recommendations can help you define and promote your organization's mission.



Clearly articulate the mission and vision statement and integrate them into organizational materials, which can influence current employees' intention to stay committed and attract motivated, well-suited applicants who identify with your mission and vision. This strategy can also reduce absenteeism.[4]

Demonstrate organizational principles in your workplace behaviors. Employees speak highly of and trust the vision of leaders who believe deeply in the organization's mission and vision statement and whose behavior is consistent with it.[5] For example, if the mission and vision emphasize employee wellbeing, managers can express support for an employee's wellbeing and simultaneously ensure their workload does not exceed their bandwidth.

Inspire your employees by sharing your organization's vision and allowing them to take part in decision-making processes that impact their future with the organization.[5]

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

To increase employees' perceptions of the attractiveness or salience of your organization's mission and vision, clarify and communicate your organization's values as well. Organizational values are the guiding principles for expected behavior.[1] Values influence and reinforce your organization's desired culture.

Help employees understand how their daily activities are interdependent and align with the organization's mission, vision, and values. Whether on the front lines or in support roles, this action can make their work more meaningful to them[6], which can improve their loyalty and commitment.

Enhance employees' sense of belonging by using your organization's mission and value statements to create a spirit of unity among them, which can increase trustworthiness and a sense of belonging.[7] A few ways to foster belonging are to encourage open communication amongst management and staff, value everyone's input equally, identify and show employees how they represent the mission of the organization, make an effort to include all team members in meetings or work activities, etc.[8]

Foster Employee Well-being

Well-being in the workplace is defined as a manageable workload, supportive management, positive relationships with coworkers, work-life balance, sense of control in the work environment, and a feeling of support from the organization.[9,10] Well-being is associated with increased feelings of commitment and attachment to the organization.[11,12] The well-being of an employee supports increased work productivity, higher retention rates, and intention to stay with the organization.[13] Organizations that focus on employees' well-being create a resilient and healthy workforce[14] with lower turnover rates and superior work performance.[15,16,17] DoD places emphasis on promoting a productive and positive work environment by focusing on the needs of employees and providing benefits that support employees at all career and life stages. A few of the benefits DoD provides to promote well-being and work life balance are health and wellness programs, flexible work schedules, telework options, and employee assistance programs.[18] If these options are not currently offered in your workplace, find opportunities to educate leadership about these programs as strategies for acquiring and retaining employees and improving their well-being and satisfaction. Below are a few effective strategies you can use to boost employee well-being and satisfaction in the workplace.

Promote work-life balance and build a culture of health by offering flexible work schedules, providing stress management training information, displaying information on optimal nutrition, and encouraging physical activity—all of which are directly related to a greater sense of well-being.[19]

Offer personal growth opportunities such as leadership and career development training.[19] By offering employees opportunities to grow in their career and learn new personal skills, you increase their satisfaction, engagement, and collaboration.[21]

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Provide positive feedback and offer incentives for good performance. For example, incentives could be an extra paid day off, complimentary breakfast or lunch, out-of-cycle raise, etc.

Establish positive social connections by helping employees feel valued and encouraging a healthy, supportive, and friendly work environment.[22] Organize team-building activities or team outings such as an all-hands meeting, hike at a local park, wellness fairs, etc., to encourage connections.

Create a workplace culture that encourages employees to actively work toward improving and maintaining their well-being as well as that of their coworkers, which in turn strengthens organizational commitment as a whole.[23,22] Remind employees about using their paid time off, maintain a healthy work environment, pay attention to employees and burnout.

Ensure that methods to increase and maintain well-being are actually useful to your employees. Get creative and evaluate your team's well-being by surveying them, holding team lunches to gain feedback, genuinely asking how employees are doing on a regular basis, and conducting anonymous polls.

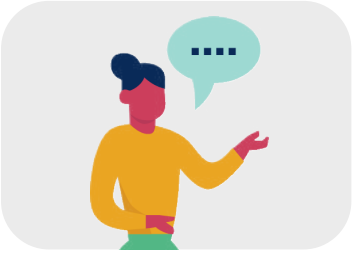
TALK ABOUT PERKS

Highlight Employee Benefits

Financial compensation and benefits offered to employees can drive motivation to perform well and remain committed to an organization. However, employees must be informed of the benefits available to them and encouraged to use them. DoD's commitment to its mission means giving employees access to competitive benefits and a healthy work-life balance. Benefits DoD provides to its employees include health, dental, vision, and life insurance; access to military exchanges; family and dependent care; competitive salaries; and paid parental leave.[24] The following strategies can help you highlight employee benefits.

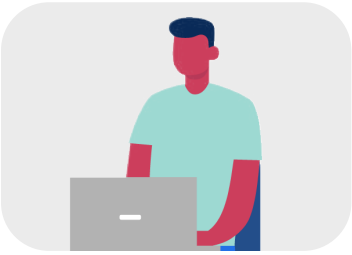
Focus benefits on the culture and environment aimed for in the workplace, keeping organizational mission and employees in mind. Create a compensation plan that keeps employees happy and motivated.

Pay attention to the needs of employees and focus on what would be most beneficial to them. Benefits can be customized based on employees' needs. Request and listen to feedback and work to ensure benefits are available and actually used.



Communicate and raise awareness of the compensations and benefits offered throughout the year to ensure all employees are making the most of them.

Reinforce the value of using benefits to further increase employees' well-being, work satisfaction, and mental health, which in turn can increase loyalty to an organization.



For certain situations, coordinate with Human Resources to provide access to and information about the Employee Assistance Program, which can help employees access available resources. Resources can include services for mental health, dealing with work or family stressors, financial counseling, substance abuse, and even optimal performance training and coaching.

TALK ABOUT PERKS

Consider adding the following benefits if you don't already have them; they can reinforce a sense of commitment and gratitude toward your organization:

Life/health and pet insurance

Paid maternity and paternity leave

Discounts for child care services

Subsidizing public transportation costs

Paid time off and emergency leave

Retirement saving assistance

AVOID STEREOTYPES

Focus on Capabilities and Avoid Age-based Stereotypes

Generational or age-based stereotyping is discriminating on the sole basis of an individual's age. Stereotypes of any nature are easy to fall into and have been attributed to an individual's, often inadvertent, desire to simplify everyday life.[25] Generational or age-based stereotypes can be detrimental to the organization, diminish employee loyalty, and stifle growth. The following strategies can help you promote awareness about age-based stereotypes and focus on an employee's job-specific capabilities.

Identify generational or age-based stereotypes that may underlie discrimination against groups of employees. Be aware of and avoid generational or age-based stereotyping, which decreases workplace morale and degrades work productivity and organizational commitment.[25]

Be alert to the use of stereotypes in creating bias in performance reviews, suppressing innovation, or hindering opportunities to build community.

Adapt your leadership style to the ability and willingness of your employees for specific work-related tasks rather than adapting tasks to your employees' age or generational cohort.[27]

Match appropriate leadership styles (e.g., directing, coaching, participating, and empowering) with the developmental level of your employee (e.g., early-career employees may need directing/coaching; mid- to late-career stage individuals may respond best to participating/empowering).[28] To promote commitment and reduce turnover within your organization, use this method to adjust your leadership style to meet the needs of individual team members.

AVOID STEREOTYPES

Instead of focusing on generational or age-based differences among employees:

Promote positive and productive workplace behaviors among all employees.

Actively learn individual employees' values, workstyle, and motivators.

Attend to what management style works best with each individual to help him or her succeed.[26]

OUT-PROCESSING

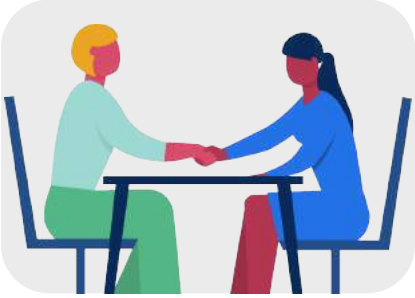
Initiate Positive Out-Processing Practices

Support employees when they leave the organization to increase the likelihood that they will respect and speak highly of your organization to others. An organization with a good reputation can recruit better talent and attract more applicants.[29] Consider using the following positive out-processing strategies.

Encourage remaining employees and emphasize their value. Create and communicate a plan to distribute the departing employee's work to minimize stress and sustain productivity.[30]

Maintain professionalism throughout the entire period of an employee's exit (e.g., use positive language toward the employee, refrain from violating confidentiality, and thank the departing employee for their service).

Retrieve all company equipment and badges to avoid any security threats.



Conduct an exit interview to learn why the employee is leaving and what needs to change to improve the organization.

OUT-PROCESSING

Reinforce loyalty when employees are leaving the organization by

Congratulating the employee on their new position.

Explaining the transition process.

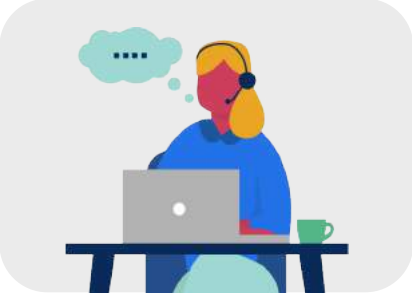
Providing employees the resources and time they need to close out their work.

Communicating the change to the rest of the team, along with a plan for how the departing employee's work will be covered.

OUT-PROCESSING

For involuntary terminations, prepare a structured plan or checklist for out-processing and include Human Resources to address questions or concerns of the employee.[30]

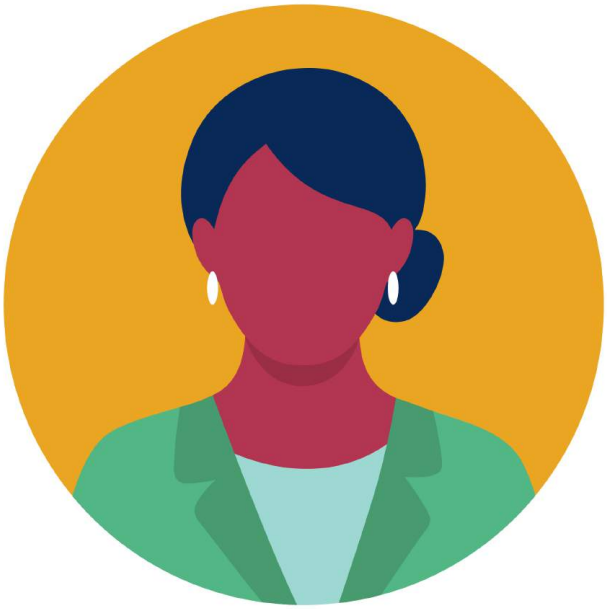
Keep the meeting brief and straightforward, explaining the reason with supporting documents and facts.

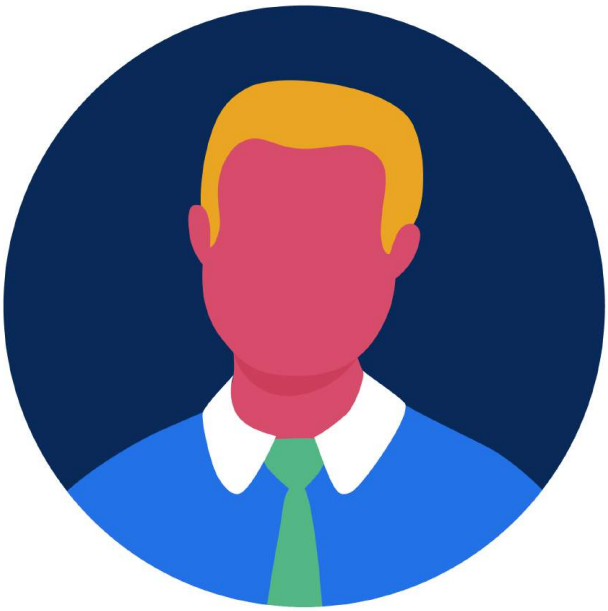


Make sure you have the proper training to handle termination meetings or involve other staff who do to ensure the safety of the organization and the departing employee.

Remain confident and actively listen to the employee during termination meetings to prevent any violence or future risks to the organization.

CAREER STAGE CARDS





The guidebook provides information on how to support your employees to build loyalty and commitment. For more strategies that apply to specific career stages, take a look at the employee career stage cards included. The career stage cards cover the various challenges employees can face throughout their careers categorized by early career, mid-career, late career, and mix/transitional/multi-stage phases. These cards provide a quick reference to evidence-based strategies that can be used to address employees' challenges while enhancing your organization's goals.

EARLY CAREER

Individuals in this career stage are generally those who are transitioning from high school, college, or possibly military service and are seeking work. Employees in this career stage are adjusting to a new career or getting acclimated to the professional or civilian workforce.[31]

EARLY CAREER

EMPLOYEES AT THIS CAREER STAGE	WAYS TO HELP
May want to explore and experience new roles and responsibilities.	• Offer information about your organization's professional development opportunities, policies, and support.[32] • Provide professional development opportunities that include on the job training, networking, mentoring, and educational or professional training (e.g. leadership training).
May transition directly from college and may have significant debt and very little savings. Economic insecurity is likely to be particularly challenging at this career stage.	• Advertise your Employee Assistance Program and its services, including financial counseling.[33] • Encourage participation in your organization's employer-sponsored retirement plan as a way to build wealth.
Are at the beginning of their career and may be limited in their understanding of workplace functions and their task-related ability.	• Provide orientation about rules and regulations and organizational culture. • Offer career, occupational and personality assessment instruments to help determine an employee's eligibility for promotion and predict training needs.
Are likely to be learning how to manage new things in their personal life (such as renting an apartment and managing finances).	• Post an e-bulletin board to share information about housing, roommates, and carpools. • Offer brownbag lunch guest speakers about managing life events.
Need to learn how to maintain work-life balance.	• Try to accommodate the employee's requested needs, such as offering flexible schedules, and taking Paid Time Off.[33] • Help your employees create a plan to succeed and meet the expectations of the organization.

MID-CAREER

Represents professionals who have been in the workforce long enough to exhibit performance efficiencies or deficits. During this career stage, individuals gain the experience and knowledge of the job to enable effective performance. This allows them to shift their focus toward stability and career advancement.[31, 34]

MID-CAREER

EMPLOYEES AT THIS CAREER STAGE	WAYS TO HELP
May experience a more significant need for establishing long-term, and strong commitments to work and family.[33]	• Focus on reinforcing work-life stability and career advancements.[33] • Support employees in identifying and achieving goals.
May feel overwhelmed by roles and tasks accumulated to date.	• Support the employee in prioritizing activities, roles, and tasks that energize the employee and align with their goals. • Teach effective delegation of work as appropriate
May feel they have reached a pinnacle and run out of goals to achieve. **May be less at risk of turn-over compared to other career stages, but still appreciate opportunities to advance within an organization.**	• Explore the employee's position growth potential within the organization. DoD positions are often designed to encourage employee career growth while supporting the organizational mission.[32] • Think creatively about new roles and challenges for the employee. • Provide stimulating work, challenge employees by assigning work that may be new to them or requires them to learn new skills.[34] Show employees they are valued and needed in the organization. • Schedule time to get to know your employees and what their future goals are, plan one-one meetings, all-hands meetings, team engagement lunches or outings, etc.
May feel the need to redefine career goals in an effort to conduct work that matters in accordance with their values a working professional. **May pursue leadership roles outside of the organization to pursue activities that are purposeful.**	• Be aware that when employees perceive value conflicts, retention might be adversely affected.[35] • Discuss career goals and be open to new or newly focused areas that are meaningful to the employee. • Consider how the organization's mission intersects with the employee's priorities and ways to emphasize the connection. • Identify leadership opportunities that align with the employee's priorities.
May pursue opportunities for learning and personal growth.[34]	• Inform employees about professional development opportunities such as certification courses relevant to their career (e.g. software/database training, writing or communication course, etc.). • Identify formal training programs or create an individual learning plan with employee career goals in mind.[32]
May experience higher levels of stress, performance issues, and burnout.[36]	• Advertise your Employee Assistance Program and its services, including counseling services and Health and Wellness programs.[37, 38] • Offer stress management and resilience-building training programs. • Offer flexible work schedules, work from home option, set limits and manage employee workload, and ensure there is open communication between manager and employee.[39]

LATE CAREER

Includes those who are approaching retirement and transitioning out of the workforce. During this career stage, individuals are not looking to progress into new career paths and may be less receptive to supervisor support.[34]

LATE CAREER

EMPLOYEES AT THIS CAREER STAGE	WAYS TO HELP
May exhibit less psychological distress and burnout than do early or mid-career employees.[40] **May want to explore and experience new mentorship roles and responsibilities.[34]**	• Pair late-career employees with early and mid-career employees to share coping strategies, and lessons learned, which may also further increase purpose for those in the late career stage.
May desire to "wind down" slowly in a way that enables them to maintain an income stream for a period, but only as a segue to eventual full retirement when the time is right.[41] **May want to officially retire but continue to work in some capacity.[42]**	• Communicate your organization's resources that help employees with preparing for retirement. • Allow late-stage career employees to work in a manner that is aligned with the needs of both the organization and the individual. However, for the sake of fairness, avoid special deals for specific late-career individuals, unless they can be offered to every employee.[41] • Investigate whether late-career workers can try "bridging", whereby they shift to a part-time work schedule before fully retiring.[43] • If possible, offer opportunities for mutually predetermined part-time work schedules, per diem/ consulting work, and/or job sharing.[41] These options allow experience, knowledge, internal and external relationships, and mentoring to remain within the organization. • Promote the DoD's phased retirement program, involving the employee's announcement of his or her plan to retire and a phase-in period to reduce work commitments while retaining institutional knowledge.[44, 45] The reduction in duties can allow the retiring employee to work for a longer period and maintain greater financial stability. • Ask about interest in continuing to work after retirement.
May delay retirement because they are healthy and energetic and derive personal satisfaction and a sense of purpose from their employment.	• Continue to show employees they are valued and a part of the team. Assign leadership roles or tasks that may involve training/mentoring other employees.
May face additional health problems that require time off of work, modifications to their work environment, require special ergonomic equipment, adjusting their schedule, or working from home. **May be unlikely to self-recognize any cognitive impairment.[45]**	• Ensure awareness of health insurance benefits and resources available to promote health and encourage employees to utilize those resources. • Provide preventative services to employees, such as holding wellness classes, sharing mindfulness tips, promoting a healthy lifestyle, etc. These services can help encourage employees to focus on implementing healthier habits in their life.

MIX/TRANSITIONAL/ MULTI-STAGE

Represents individuals who may have had an established career previously, but transitioned to new position, career path, or are returning from a leave of absence. These employees may face new obstacles and are learning what is required in their new role. Managers should work with employees closely to understand what their goals are and be able to support them as needed.

MIX/TRANSITIONAL/ MULTI-STAGE

EMPLOYEES AT THIS CAREER STAGE	WAYS TO HELP
May take time to get accustomed to their new position and transition.[46]	• Be patient and understanding, work with these employees to get them to the level needed to perform well. Provide feedback to help employees understand if they are doing well or need improvement in certain areas.[46] • Provide additional virtual or hands on training, assign a mentor, share resources such as articles, guidebooks, or videos for employees to utilize on their own and refer back to when needed.
May have a diverse set of skills and appreciate professional growth opportunities. **May be following their passion in changing careers.** **May have skills that translate into their new role.** **May experience more job satisfaction and plan to remain in their jobs when they are newly hired.[34]**	• Work with employees to fully utilize their skillsets in new positions/roles. • Encourage and motivate these employees to foster and maintain their positivity and good attitude. Provide connections to like-minded employees and enable them to continue learning and exploring their passion. • Learn about what the employee can bring to the position and how their expertise can assist others. • Pair newly hired and existing employees at this stage to create a supportive network.
May feel as if they are falling behind compared to others their age or as if they are starting over completely.	• Provide resources such as access to counseling/ mentors, additional guidance on expectations, and structured orientation to support the transition and minimize disruptions.[47] • Have employees create a career path and plan to help them visualize their future aspirations concretely.
May experience feelings of anxiety, stress, role confusion, self-doubt, and emotional turmoil.[48, 46]	• Ensure well-being is being prioritized and individual is aware of any resources available (e.g., stress management training, Employee Assistance Program). • Provide support, positive feedback, opportunities to ask questions, and role clarification. • Pair the employee with a peer co-worker who is in a similar role with more experience or expertise to foster support and communication and provide guidance.

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The Threat Lab: A Brief History

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) founded The Threat Lab in 2018 to realize the Department of Defense (DoD) Counter-Insider Threat Program Director's vision to incorporate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space. Our team is headquartered in Seaside, California, and includes psychologists, sociologists, policy analysts, computer scientists, and other subject matter experts committed to workforce protection.

Our business model is simple: We work with stakeholders to transform operational challenges into actionable research questions. We then design and execute research projects that result in accessible, concise findings and recommendations that we integrate into training and awareness materials for organizations to use as is or to customize for their own purposes.

For more information or to request a briefing, please email us at **Dodhra.ThreatLab@mail.mil**