



I'm recording this at the beginning of the holiday season. I have my festive earrings on and everything.

If you're watching this and it's not the holiday season, don't turn it off. There's still a lot of value in the message of this video, which is about being clear.

We're going to focus this message on that end of the year holiday season when there's a lot of talk around gift giving, and there's this compulsion for a lot of organizations to institute this element of surprise and to have this lack of transparency about what is going on.

But the message is going to be that whether it's the holiday season or not, giving the gift of clarity is always so important to your staff.

I used to work at this organization where every time a holiday would roll around, they loved this element of surprise, particularly on the day before the holiday. Instead of letting us know ahead of time that they would be letting us out early, the boss always wanted to send this surprise email and let us know that we could leave early. It wasn't really a surprise though, because he would do it every time, so really the only surprise would be what time would we actually go this time?

Some years it was an hour early, other years it was a couple hours early. Sometimes it would be as early as lunchtime. One year it was even before lunchtime, so the buzz around the office would be like, what time is it going to be this year?

I think for the boss, there was something kind of exciting and nice about that element of surprise. Of course, for us it was nice to be let out early, but at the same time, it was a little frustrating and a little bit annoying because we just didn't ever know.

In a busy holiday season, it would've been helpful to know exactly what time we could be let out early so that we could plan accordingly and really use that gift of the extra time to our benefit.

One year something happened- he got caught up and he never sent the email at all. So, we were expecting this quote unquote surprise that never came, and we ended up having to work the whole day anyway.

So, wanting to have this element of surprise for the sake of some whimsy or for a little bit of fun for the benefit of the employees really isn't the great idea that a lot of bosses and a lot of organizations think it is.

For one, it can cause a lot of anxiety and a lot of stress just not knowing what time it is going to be, what is the surprise?

When is it coming? And in the case of the forgotten surprise, when it ends up not coming at all, when you've grown to expect it, it's not really as fun as people think it might be or hope it will be. And really, it's not something that most people are asking for or really want.



Instead, my recommendation is to be clear.

Yes, it takes a little bit of fun out of it.

Yes, it takes a little bit of that holiday magic away, but giving that gift of clarity is giving your staff something they actually want, is making sure that they know exactly what to expect so that they are clear with what is coming for them, the good stuff, and anything that is expected of them so that they're not put into a position that they are not prepared for this holiday season.

Always be as clear as you can possibly be so that your staff are as prepared as they can possibly be.

When it comes to your evaluations at the end of the year, make sure that your staff are prepared as soon as humanly possible.

I like when I hire people when we are going through the orientation process to let them know from the very beginning, this is how the process of evaluations work here. This is what you're going to be evaluated on. This is what our forms look like. This is how the scoring works. This is how raises work. This is how bonuses work. I let them know that whole process.

Then throughout the year, these are the conversations that we're having so that by the time we get to evaluation season, the mantra or the cliché I say all the time is that this should be one of your most boring conversations of the year because you've already had this conversation so many times throughout the year.

Make sure that your staff know exactly what to expect when they are coming into that evaluation conversation.

This is not the time for surprises, and this is absolutely not the time to bring up something that has not been brought up before.

It's a chance to recap the year that was to talk about the year, that's about to be, but definitely not the time for surprises.

Being clear about raises, what the process is for people to get raises, being clear about what they're getting, when they're getting it, how much they're getting when it's coming into effect.

I had a situation one year where staff had grown to expect the same percentage raise every single year and one year for a variety of reasons that raise wasn't coming and my boss didn't want to tell them. It took a lot of convincing for her to tell them that their raise wasn't coming.

In that conversation, she promised to provide an update in 90 days when things were back in order.



As that 90 days was getting closer, I reminded my boss that the 90 days was getting closer, and it became very clear that she had no intention of either providing an update or ultimately providing that raise.

Staff need to know about their money. They need to be in the know so that they can plan accordingly. Raises should not be surprises. They should know exactly what to expect, be as clear and transparent as possible.

What is the process around time off?

A lot of people take time off around the holidays. What do people need to do to put in for their time off? Who's covering for whom? How do people put in what systems need to happen?

Make sure all of that is clear.

If you as a company are letting people out early, if you're giving certain days off, give people as much notice as possible so they can take full advantage of that PTO.

I know there is a strong inclination to want to give gifts that people open.

I fully appreciate this.

Every year around social media there are so many posts of people asking, what do I get my boss? What do I get my staff? What do I get my board member asking? Complete strangers? How can they know when you know these people and you don't know? But all the research in the world says the two things people want from their companies, it's not things they can open. They want money and they want time off.

Give them what they want.

Make sure people aren't put in positions where they're uncomfortable, where they're not the only one not bringing a gift when they're not the only one who is bringing a gift, where they're being expected to shell out their own money for somebody above them or to pay out of pocket for their team.

Don't expect people to use their own money on company gifts.

Just eliminate the pressure of office gift giving.

Make sure the company is covering anything that is considered a gift and make it in the form of cash, money, and time off, which is what people really want in the first place.

And if you are having a celebration, and by all means, have celebrations, make sure you're clear about the expectations, what people are wearing, what is being served.

Make sure you're being cautious and communicative around things like alcohol.



And make sure you're not asking people to pay out of their own pockets and come on their own time.

Make sure you're having it on company time when you are celebrating during the holidays and any time. This is about recognizing and valuing your staff.

So yes, there's an element of fun to keeping things surprising, but if you want to make your staff happy and feel valued and recognized, just give them the gift of clarity.

Let them know what to expect. Be clear, upfront and honest.

Thank them for all their hard work.

Give them what they need and want from you, which is clarity.

A little bit of extra cash, a little bit of time off, and that will be the best gift of all.