

INVOLVEMENT WITH EMPLOYEES: YOU MUST DISPLAY HIGH COMMITMENT

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Ask any manager to list the key ingredients in a company's growth and, undoubtedly, you will find "employees" near the top of the list. That manager realizes that the competitive advantage for any successful company ultimately will be the exceptional customer service provided by its employees. Employees must believe that providing personalized, quality service — as perceived by the customer — is the company's number-one priority.

But does that same manager set the example by really involving himself with the company's staff? Does he recognize this vital point: if managers take care of their employees, those employees, in turn, will take care of the customers? Does he promote the commitment to exceptional customer service through happy and motivated employees? Is he truly employee oriented? Does he respond to and meet the needs of his employees? Ask yourself the following questions and see how committed your company is to its most valuable asset — your employees.

Do your owners or senior managers participate in new employee orientation?

Every new employee who joins your staff should be seen as a marketing associate and should understand your company's market position and strategic vision. Who better to introduce that vision than the owner or general manager? The owner or senior manager sets the environment for a motivated, energetic staff. His message to the new employees should instill a sense of pride, ownership, and teamwork. Also, if you want your employees to understand their role in the "bigger picture" of customer service, be certain that each employee is oriented not only to his department, but also to other departments. Reinforcing a hotel's manager's message of teamwork, the new restaurant employee, for example, should meet the kitchen staff and the new housekeeping employee should meet the laundry staff.

Does each department have a structured training program?

Rather than have the new employee merely shadow another employee, be sure that defined departmental training program exists. If new employee training is two weeks, then provide a daily agenda and a key points checklist for each day of those two weeks. Again, to reinforce the "bigger picture" of the interaction among all employees, consider a one-day training overview for related departments. For example, in a hospital, the new LPN could spend a day working in environmental services so that he can better appreciate how a vacant room turns over to become a room ready for occupancy.

Create departmental training manuals. Such manuals could include a welcome letter, job description, organizational chart, departmental rules and regulations, day-off request procedures, safety rules, and answers to the most frequently asked questions. Select designated trainers for each department. When recognized as such, these trainers will ensure that proper training is completed. The immediate supervisor and trainer should meet daily with the new employee so that they can discuss the trainee's progress. Such feedback emphasizes for the new employee, as well as the trainer, that the training process is taken very seriously in your company.

Consider, too, periodic retraining sessions to revitalize your staff. Training should not end after a certain probationary period

for the new employee. Rather, set a specific timetable, when certain procedures may be reinforced with short training modules or refresher courses.

Does each member of your staff know your company's mission statement?

Too often, the mission statement is found only in the employee handbook. If your mission statement reads, in part, that your company is committed to providing exceptional, personalized service for your customers, shouldn't your staff be reminded of that on a daily basis? Consider posting your mission statement in conspicuous areas throughout your company.

Do you provide cross-selling opportunities?

In a golf club, has each ranger and retail employee had the opportunity to dine in the various restaurants? Do they know the brand personality of each outlet? Does the food and beverage servers know the many promotions, activities or events that the club is offering for players?

Give such employees the opportunity to experience all that your company has to offer. Invite the front-desk staff to a sample tasting, directed by the executive chef, and have the concierge periodically attend the restaurant's pre-meal meeting to describe upcoming special events. Such programs encourage employees to be more familiar with your product and, in turn, upsell to your customers.

Does your staff define a quality product and quality service as perceived by the customer and not by their own standards?

Almost every company has or should have detailed customer comment card evaluations and quality control/assurance programs. Given the need to initiate immediate follow-up on which of these two programs does your staff place more emphasis when responding to the noted deficiencies? Do they even reply to individual customer comment cards, and how timely is that response?

Considering the competitive market and the fickleness of the customer, if your staff is not responding in a timely fashion to every complaint or concern perceived by the customer, you are probably losing the opportunity for a return visit or purchase. If the complaint is in an area of your responsibility, prioritize your time in calling or writing to that disgruntled customer to assure him that the quality standards in your company are an exceptional value.

Do your managers reward, in some way, extraordinary acts of customer service?

Most companies have an "Employee of the Month" award program. Such a program is important in that it recognizes the above average day-to-day performance of the nominated employees. But when was the last time a manager gave a written commendation to one of the employees for an outstanding individual act for a customer. Encourage your management team, including the sales staff in their interaction with employees to recognize such occasions. Publicize a method in which your employees can nominate fellow employees when they witness such acts of exemplary service. Such recognition, if perceived to be genuine, exemplifies to your employees that they truly are the key to the company's success.

Does the management team take employee performance appraisals seriously?

Too often, the annual employee review is perceived, as a

continued

continued from page 7

paperwork burden on managers. Instead managers should see the performance appraisal as the occasion to thank the employee for a consistent effort or as an opportunity to provide corrective action to improve an employee's work performance. This one-on-one session is a great tool in establishing the commitment of managers toward the recognition of employees as the company's key asset to success.

Is there an internal mechanism to identify employees looking for career advancement within the organization?

Have those employees who have voiced an interest in pursuing a career been identified? Is there a defined program to groom such employees? Are in-house candidates given priority consideration over outside applicants when filling key management positions? If not, consider establishing a formal program where such employees could be cross-trained in other positions or departments to provide a broader base of job experience. With such expertise, these employees can then be considered for promotion from within when such opportunities become available. Such promotions reinforce your employees' perception that you are concerned about their personal growth and upward mobility.

Do you keep your staff informed of your company's major changes?

If Board or staff meetings are held in your company, are the minutes posted for interested employees to read? In addition to posting, your meeting minutes consider practicing open book management. Consider monthly all-employee meetings to convey to attendees that month's highlights. At that time, give recognition of employee accomplishments or acts of exemplary service. The culmination of such a meeting could be the presentation of the "Employee of the Month" award. Managers who exchange such information with their employees believe that doing so creates a sense of ownership on the part of the employees, a sense that they can make the difference between a good company and a great one.

Do you "Manage by Walking About?"

Visible management is essential to reinforce your commitment to your employees. You set the example of your mission statement. For instance, if one of the values in the mission statement is attention to detail, picking up litter as you walk about serves as a significant symbolic act to your employees of that attention. Managing by walking about also provides for a communication link with management, enabling employees to voice questions or concerns.

Do you have an employee communication program in place?

Whether it is a suggestion box in the employee break room or monthly "rap" sessions with randomly selected employees, create a forum where you can listen to your employees. Take notes, and if a concern arises that requires follow-up, ensure that such follow-up is provided quickly. Recognize and reward suggestions that improve the quality of the employee work life or quest experience. The reward need not be monetary, but could be movie tickets to a nearby theatre. Your employees meet your customers daily and can provide excellent feedback on customers' needs and concerns.

Are you constantly monitoring the on-site benefits provided to your employees to ensure they are the best possible?

Your employees come to work at your company for two basic reasons: remuneration and the quality of the work life you have created, which provides for an enjoyable environment. Since the wage rates are probably similar among companies in your market, if the work environment might be better somewhere else, your employees will eventually leave for another company.

Accordingly, be certain that items or areas specifically, for employees are maintained properly. If uniforms are provided, make sure they are in good condition and if you provide an employee meal, plan a varied menu, and if certain items like desserts can't be provided on a daily basis, consider offering it once a week. Regularly inspect the employee restrooms, break areas and dining room to ensure clean, sanitary facilities. Give special attention to the employee entrance. Too often, that area, normally situated at the back of the building possibly next to the trash bin, is poorly maintained. If this area is kept immaculate, it serves as daily reinforcement of the company's very positive managerial commitment toward the care of its employees.

Are the employee programs maintained for long-range benefit?

Your employees must perceive any programs initiated for the benefit of the employees as long-term investments toward their welfare, rather than an employee-morale "quick fix." Only then will the employees really believe in your genuine commitment to the maintenance of a happy and motivated staff.

If you answered "yes" to all of the above questions, you definitely have a strong commitment to your employees. ■

HARBOR SPRINGS CHAMBER RECEIVES AWARDS



The Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce was recently presented with awards from the Michigan Chamber of Commerce Executives.

The 2002 Outstanding Chamber Website Award recognized chambers with outstanding websites, based on the criteria of appeal, clarity and content. Cindy Dickson and Marcie Szczubelek of Harbor Springs Web Design designed the web site, which offers extensive information on the Harbor Springs area, including business listings, tourist information, a wedding planner and an events calendar. You can visit the website at www.harborspringschamber.com.

The Harbor Chamber was also honored with an Outstanding Publication Award for their 2003-2003 Visitor's Guide. The Outstanding Publication Award is presented to chambers with outstanding publications based on appeal, clarity and content.

The 2002-2003 Visitor's Guide was produced by Concierge Publications of Harbor Springs, which is owned by Kathryn Breighner. Breighner produces numerous publications, from Menu Guides to the popular Concierge. You can also see the 2002-2003 Visitor's Guide by visiting the Chamber's website.

Finally, the Harbor Springs and Petoskey Regional Chambers of Commerce were awarded a 2002 Outstanding Publication for the Back to Business newsletter, produced by Harbor House Publishers in Boyne City. ■