

Building Your Business From the Inside Out

by
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When business owners and managers think of customer satisfaction, they think of customers who buy their products or services. Businesses spend a large portion of their budget on marketing to their potential and current customers. While your external customers purchase your goods, the internal customers (employees) have a large influence on the business' continuation, as they are the business' direct link to the external customers. Employees' attitudes about their job has a major impact on the company's relations with its customers. To make a business successful, a business needs to start with what's inside, namely it's most important assets, the employees.

Perhaps you've seen employees that act like they don't care about their job or the customers. While there can be many reasons for this attitude, the employer can often help their employees' attitudes by exhibiting the proper attitude themselves, by helping the employees learn why their role is important to the business as well as to themselves, and by rewarding them for their efforts. Here are a few tips that can help the business owner or manager help ensure the employees' loyalty, and ultimately retain its external customers as well.

First, owners and managers should pay attention to how they reward their employees. Do you notice only the negative and follow that up with punitive action? By doing so, you draw attention to and reward the negative behavior. Consider rewarding the employees' positive behaviors; you'll likely have a better outcome. Let employees know how important their contribution is to the success of the company and that they'll be rewarded for their loyalty, then do so.

Consider *your* attitude. Owners and managers display an attitude, positive or negative, that they unconsciously model for their employees. You are a role model for your employees and they will often unwittingly pick up your attitude.

Treat employees like human beings, with a family and life outside of their work. Just as you must deal with things that come up unexpectedly, so do your employees. Yes, it is difficult when the unexpected happens, especially when you have to get the work done for the customer, but putting more pressure on the employee rarely solves the issue. They still must deal with whatever has happened. By helping them do so, you can expedite their return to productive work. After all, you expect them to adjust when business demands extra hours or effort, so trying to understand when things happen to them that is beyond their control will usually reward the employer with respect and loyalty.

Provide an environment that's conducive to productive work. Think first about the physical arrangement of the office or workplace. If an employee is distracted by background noise, putting him or her in a large room to make phone calls all day with twenty other people also making calls might not be the way to get the most from that employee. Similarly, putting an employee in a room with other employees who are unsupportive will drive down that employee's productivity as well. Every employee is different and they do their best work in their own way. Setting up the workplace to be supportive and take advantage of each employee's best method of working is well worth the effort in terms of potential productivity and can sometimes be accomplished with little or no cost.

Offer benefits. Yes, health insurance is getting more expensive all the time, but losing an employee's productivity and loyalty because they're worried about not being able to afford basic health care for themselves and their families is even more expensive. Even if your company cannot provide health care insurance for your employees there are things you can do to help your employees. For example, you can make sure that all employees take their paid vacation time to help them recharge. Beyond that, you can also offer unpaid time off, if desired by the employee, so they can take the time to deal with family business or simply get some rest and relaxation during stressful times. Doing this can help your employee feel more in control of their schedule and more likely to pitch in when the company needs extra time. You can help the employee stay healthy by promoting healthy lifestyles and stress reduction. Be creative. Best of all, you can ask the employee what would benefit them personally and try to provide it. One employee is not a clone of another, so it makes no sense to automatically treat them all the same. Treating someone fairly is sometimes not the same as being treated exactly the same, because each employee has different needs and wants. Think about it.

Finally, don't forget the "pat on the back." I find this is often at the top of employees' lists of desired benefits. Do it often and sincerely! This will go a long way toward helping your employees feel wanted and needed and will help them stay loyal to you. And staying loyal to you and the company means they're more likely to treat the external customers well, which will only help your business grow and prosper. When your employee took the job, they made a commitment to your business. You made an investment when you hired that employee, and as with any investment it must be maintained and enhanced to receive the maximum benefit.

Sometimes business owners and managers consider their employees to be an expense...a *big* expense. In fact, the employee is actually an asset, an asset that both the business and employee have an investment in. You'll find that looking at your employees as an asset instead of an expense goes a long way toward increasing your employee retention, which will help your business prosper due to higher rates of customer retention. So check your attitude, pay attention to your employees' needs, and reap the positive results of building your business from the inside out.