Maximizing Employee Performance

Have you wondered what makes an employee want to be at work every day and do their best? There are employees that are happy with their jobs and perform their best. On the other hand, we also have employees that just don’t seem to care and their poor performance shows it. Often times those that don’t care tend to have attendance or behavior problems, and their overall attitude is anything but positive. I think we can all agree, we want employees that perform well and we also want to retain those employees. So, how do you find the employees you want, and when you find them, how do you keep them?

I read an article originally published in the Forward HR Fall 2012 edition written by Katie Loehrke, Editor, J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. In this article, Katie suggests strategies to maximize employee engagement. I would like to reiterate a few of her suggestions while adding some of my own regarding what you can do to encourage your employees to perform at their best.

1. **Begin with the hiring process.** Be prepared for the interview, simply arriving to an interview unprepared can give an applicant the wrong impression.

2. **Be clear about job duties and expectations.** Share what your store’s goals are and how the employee contributes to meeting these goals. Discuss with the employee how important they are for the success of your store. From the first day, be sure expectations are discussed frequently to stay on track.

3. **Provide challenges and opportunities.** You may be hesitant to give employees new challenges when they are already dealing with heavy workloads. However, Katie cites a Towers Perrin survey indicating that challenging work can actually mitigate some of the negative impact of a demanding workload. It is okay, and even beneficial, to challenge your employees a bit as long as the challenge is reasonable.

4. **Give employees authority.** We often feel empowered when we have the freedom to make decisions that affect us and others. Well, employees do too. Requiring employees to get approval for all decisions can slow efficiency and may cause them to feel you do not have trust in them, which can lead to a feeling of not belonging and unimportance.

5. **Provide proper tools and training.** Even a person with 30 years of experience may need training. Not every store is the same with regard to policies, procedures, responsibilities, customers, and the overall environment. The employee may feel you are setting them up to fail if you do not provide them with what is needed to successfully perform their job. Sometimes it is best to come out and ask the employee to tell you what they need to perform their job well.

6. **Recognize employees.** Yes, receiving that paycheck is rewarding; however, think about other rewards you can provide your employees. Recognition goes a long way to let the employees know they are succeeding in their job, they are important, and you appreciate and notice their efforts. What about rewarding them a vacation day for good attendance, or having a monthly drawing for a gift certificate? Not all rewards need to have monetary value; it can be as simple as telling an employee they did a good job handling a customer that was upset. Providing the employee with additional responsibilities or opportunities can also be rewarding.

7. **Encourage working as a team.** Working as a team provides employees with the feeling that they belong. Get your employees together on a regular basis for meetings and ask for input or suggestions. If a project arises, have two or more employees work together on that project. Just be a part of and encourage a team environment.

8. **Show you care about your employees.** Employees are people and need to feel like they are cared about as individuals, not just as employees.

Should you try giving an employee, currently with attendance or behavior issues, more authority? Probably not now, but work on recognizing that when they do a good job and encourage them to improve in other areas. Take those small steps. Be sure they have the tools and training they need. You know your employees. There may be an employee that just has a bad attitude and, regardless of what you do, that employee may just not work out. However, there are more employees that want to enjoy their jobs and perform well than those that don’t.

An employee that enjoys his or her job will treat customers well, and that is always good for business. Give it some thought, and try a few of the above suggestions. But be patient, changes may not happen overnight.

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