



Stoking the Home Fires...

by Chanon Collins

for Allen Pritchett & Bassett, LLP

In the midst of this holiday season, if one questioned a business owner with “What is the most important element to your business?”, most would likely respond with “the customer.” In most cases this is true, but I would argue that the person representing your business to the customer is of immense value. In this time of seasonal workers and temporary positions, it might be wise to examine what your workplace has to offer...do you have what it takes to hire and retain excellent employees?

Thomas Kasten, a former executive of Levi Strauss, believes that there are very simple ways to attract and retain the most talented employees. Kasten states, “The two most important factors [of retaining employees] are the quality of management and employee’s ability to work on way-cool things.” While not all businesses can tout “way-cool” activities for their employees, they can improve the atmosphere and workplace.

One essential factor for retaining strong employees is to educate them about every aspect of the business. Explain your company’s financials so that they can see how their efforts will positively improve the business’s bottom line. Ken Blanchard, author of **One-Minute Manager**, once stated “what’s the point in playing the game if you don’t ever get to see the score?” Uninformed employees tend to be unproductive employees.

Make use of your company’s greatest resource – your team members. Each person on your team is an individual who, when coupled with the entire team, creates a powerhouse of skills. Kasten recalls a particular aspect of Levi Strauss entitled “Talent Inventory.” This database contained a list of every employee along with each person’s abilities and interests. Any business would be able to utilize this database in selecting team members for special projects or in creating a new division.

Does your company use a mentoring system for new team members? If not, you should begin implementing this system immediately. A mentor serves as a guide for the new employee, making him or her feel welcomed, and

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explaining first-hand the internal functions of the business. The mentor also provides an informed contact for the new employee who might feel rather overwhelmed or too intimidated to ask many questions during the first few weeks on the job.

As a business owner and leader of your team, you **MUST** know the names of each and every person who works for your company. There is nothing more disenchanting than to see a manager/owner stumble or search for an employee's name. This is an essential element to retaining excellent employees – do not ignore this important detail.

While you can't ensure that every employee will remain with you until retirement, you can learn from those who leave. Conduct exit interviews to determine areas for improvement in the company. People who are leaving for another job will more than likely be quite candid about their work experiences. Take this opportunity to turn a small setback into a proactive system.

If one piece of advice can be given, it is this – do not neglect your greatest assets. Benjamin Franklin said it best – “Hide not your talents, they were made for use. What's a sundial in the shade?”

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