



DO YOU WALK YOUR TALK?

If everything about your store operations seems impeccable, but productivity and morale are still down, it may be time to take a closer look at management.

By Stan Pohmer

Last month I was asked to visit one of my client's facilities to help them determine why they've experienced lower productivity than in their other locations and to find the root cause of their high turnover and low employee morale at this site. They had already gone through the process of benchmarking the performance of this location versus the others within their organization and the variances were significant. An internal review of their operating procedures and facilities showed that they had all the tools and support needed to be at least as efficient and effective as their other facilities. The corporate culture of the company was also very positive, supportive and people-oriented.

THE PROBLEM

The first step of my review was to gather information on-site. This meant not only reviewing and analyzing the numbers, but asking questions and soliciting input from the management team to gain their perspectives and insights on what was going on and what they thought might be causing the problems. The numbers I saw didn't lie — they definitely had problems. But the input from the facility management team and supervisors indicated that they were doing all the right operational things to try to manage and improve the performance numbers.

Listening to them and observing the surface indications of their relationships with their employees made it appear that all of the positive corporate culture processes and activities were also in place. They talked about team meetings with the employees to review the vision and strategies, having performance charts (actual vs. plan) posted for the employees to see; they even had a series of motivational posters and slogans hanging throughout the office and in the work spaces. Ostensibly, they were doing all the right things.

However, when I went out into the work areas and talked to the hourly employees, the backbone of any company, I heard a completely different story. There was a chronic history of insensitivity, a pervasive pessimistic attitude and plenty of finger-pointing displayed by the management team. Excuses and negative challenge in dealing with problems were the norm. Bottom line, it was not a fun place to be, and there was no positive motivation to get things corrected and moving in the right direction. The problems weren't with the processes or systems, nor with the employees — they were with the management. Once the root cause of the issue was identified, steps were taken to resolve them. The fixes won't happen overnight; it will take some time to rebuild the trust and confidence of the employees in the management team, but it can be done.

MANAGING DEMOTIVATORS

Talking the talk is the easy part, walking the talk a lot more difficult. Management often perceive themselves as truly walking their talk, but employees quickly see if this isn't really the case; to them they're just watching a charade, someone going through the motions without any substance or credibility behind them.

Thinking back on this particular situation, I bemoan all the time, effort, money, and human resources and potential that have been wasted. It made me recall a Web site — www.demotivation.com — I've often visited for comic relief. But in its disingenuous and mocking satirical mission — "No matter who you are, you have the potential to be so very much less" — this Web site clearly can serve as an example of the negative messages that we as managers may unconsciously be sending, internally and externally. Allow me to quote some of the musings from the founder of this site, E. L. Kersten, Ph.D. Though these pithy quotes are thought-

provoking by themselves, they are even more profound when paired with the photographs on the Web site.

Apathy: "If we don't take care of the customer, maybe they'll stop bugging us."

Blame: "The secret to success is knowing who to blame for your failures."

Demotivation: "Sometimes the best solution to morale problems is just to fire all of the unhappy people."

Elitism: "It's lonely at the top. But it's comforting to look down upon everyone at the bottom."

Arrogance: "The best leaders inspire by example. When that's not a option, brute intimidation works pretty well, too."

Dare to Slack: "When birds fly in the right formation, they need only exert half the effort. Even in nature, teamwork results in collective laziness."

Procrastination: "Hard work often pays off after time, but laziness always pays off now."

Ignorance: "It's amazing how much easier it is for a team to work together when no one has any idea where they're going."

Problems: "No matter how great and destructive your problems may seem now, remember, you've probably only seen the tip of them."

Mistakes: "It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others."

Few get up in the morning calculating how bad we're going to mess things up today or how many minds we're going to play with. But, despite our best intentions, there are too many times when we don't back up our words with positive actions, when we don't walk the talk. Consciously make the effort, and I truly believe you'll get the results you expect. 🍀

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