



# committed employees

Employees who feel like they make a difference in your business will work harder to never let you or the business down. Here are a few ways to make that happen.

By Carol Hacker

**W**ouldn't it be wonderful if all of the people who work for you were as committed to your business as you are? The reality is if they were that committed they would probably have a business of their own. However, there are exceptions, and if you have people who are as concerned as you are about what happens in your business, take good care of them! Employees who share your strong inner drive to succeed are special, and some are even willing to make great personal sacrifices to ensure profitability. These people are the backbone of your business. They are willing to make sacrifices for you. They are motivated and willing to help take your business to the next level. As for the rest of your employees, here are some ideas to get them to make a commitment to you and the business you love.

## HIRE FOR ATTITUDE

Hiring the right people the first time has a lot to do with employee loyalty. One of your jobs as the owner or manager is to locate, screen and hire only those individuals who are the right fit for you and your business. Conduct a thorough interview, check references and hire for attitude. Then, teach them what they need to know. These steps take time, but they are worth it when you hire a motivated employee who is excited about his or her job. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Treat all job candidates like your best customers. Make sure that all of your employees understand the importance of showing interest in and respect for everyone who steps foot on your property.
- Avoid the number-one mistake that hiring managers make — talk-

ing too much during the interview. Speak 20 percent of the time and listen 80 percent of the time. Your job is to gather rather than give information during the interview. Only after you are through asking questions should you invite the candidate to question you.

- Determine the candidate's weaknesses. They will be quick to share their strengths, which is also important. However, once you find out where candidates are weak, you should know immediately whether or not you want to extend a job offer.

- Ask questions from your list that you have prepared in advance of the interview. Asking the same or similar questions of each of the candidates interviewing for the position is a good way to compare each candidate and their answers against each other more easily.

- Check references. Make it part of your business's policy to check 3-4 work-related references. Personal references are next to worthless. References are easy to get; simply put the responsibility of providing references on the candidate's shoulders. If they cannot come up with references that will do more than verify the fact that they were employed where they say they were, forget them.

## GETTING THEM STARTED

An orientation to your business and the job has proven benefits. Consider an informal mentor program whereby current employees volunteer their time as mentors to new employees for whatever length of time you feel is needed. Orientation is an on-going process and could last a year or more. Friendships that result are a bonus for all people involved. ▶

**Above:** Watering is no fun, but when employees, like this one at Poundridge Nurseries, Pound Ridge, N.Y., understand the impact every job has on overall success they'll be less likely to rush through it.

Take your new hires out to lunch to celebrate just as you do when someone leaves the business. Or host an on-site barbecue or even a potluck. There is no better way to welcome new employees than by getting them involved and allowing them to meet their peers during the first week on the job. It should be a warm and wonderful welcome from all of you to them.

Greet your new employees in person on the day they start work. Do not assign this important task to someone else, or you risk sending the mes-

sage that the new hire is an inconvenience or at the very least not important enough for the owner to personally welcome him or her.

**BE POSITIVE**

Everyone makes mistakes; it's part of the learning process. However, you have every right to expect that mistakes will decrease as the new employee learns the job and how things are done at your place of business. Never count mistakes as crimes. If you do, your employees will be afraid to be honest with you. Their loyalty will also be questionable if they fear retribution when they run into problems. Open the door to honest communication the day they start working for you, and never let up. It's also a great way to build commitment.

**EMPOWER THEM**

Decide what decisions they will be allowed to make during the first three months on the job before you put them on payroll. Discuss authority and expectations when they start so there are no misunderstandings later. Behavioral psychologist, Kurt Einstein, offered these words of wisdom, "To the degree that people know what is expected, to the same degree they can succeed." Make sure you communicate all of your expectations; never leave anything to chance.

In addition, empower by delegating. Do not hold back if your employees are eager and capable of taking on new assignments and additional work. Delegating is a form of reward for those employees who are looking for a new challenge, especially if there is no place to "move up." Unfortunately, many owners micro-manage, and their employees become disheartened. The need to control the details can be destructive and quickly lead to employee turnover. Effective owners and managers make a conscious effort to spread the work assignments along with the authority among their trusted employees. The word "trusted" is key, as you would not want to assign important work to someone you did not trust.

**SHARE THE PRIDE**

You have pride for what you do and what your business has to offer. Set the example. If you are grumpy and discouraged, your employees know it! With a poor attitude or a moody disposition, you will only model the behavior that you expect from them, and you will not see a commitment to your business. This also goes for your managers. They must also set the example in the way that you feel is acceptable. Managers who go above



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Employees need to know that you believe in them — that you trust them to manage a project on their own. This can include anything from running a department to filling pots like these guys at Scarsella's Flowers, Greenhouses & Home, Laurel Hollow, N.Y.

and beyond are the kind of people you undoubtedly want on your team. ▶

**COMPENSATE FAIRLY**

You do not have to pay the highest wages in the industry, but if you are



A good way to boost workplace morale is to fully utilize employee talents. Atlantic Garden Center, Virginia Beach, Va., makes sure employees have talent and interest before giving them design responsibilities.

the lowest-paying employer in your community, you will not be able to keep good people for any length of time. Find out what the competition pays, including other businesses in your area and compensate accordingly. This strategy may require taking less for yourself if you are the owner, but less will become more when employee turnover is reduced. It is also possible that your benefits and perks, in addition to the fact that you have a great place to work, can sometimes offset what you cannot offer in compensation.

**MONITOR WORKPLACE MORALE**

Morale is elusive, but it is a critical part of every business. There are many ways to increase morale, but you have to first recognize that you have a problem when it's low. The biggest indicator of low morale is high turnover. If you have gone through changes such as downsizing, rapid growth, death or serious illness of an employee, many new people joining the business, etc., you may find that some of your employees are grieving the loss of the way things used to be. Do not mistake grief for low morale. Give people time to deal with the loss they are experiencing. Everyone grieves at his or her own pace, which is something that could be difficult for you to accept. You may move on from disappointment much faster than your employees do. It may be a result of maturity or as simple as your psyche. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to respond to change and bad news (or even good news) the way you do.

Morale is a part of the culture of your business, and it can be good or bad. You can contribute to high morale by creating a positive work environment where employees are recognized for their efforts even if they do not always reach their goals. There is a lot to be said for effort, but it is often overlooked when celebrating the achievements

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The indicators of low morale include a lack of laughter and a sense of enjoyment. When employees are whispering, often behind the backs of the owners and managers, some may be discussing quitting with their peers, while others may be gossiping. These subtle, and not so subtle, signs can be a “red flag,” telling you that morale is on the decline. On the other hand, how will you know when morale is improving? You will see it on the faces of your employees who will be smiling and showing a willingness to take on new assignments as needed. Your attitude about your business and life in general will impact the morale of your employees whether you realize it or not.

### CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

The “seagull” owner or manager swoops in, makes a lot of noise, dumps on employees and flies away. Criticizing your employees is a delicate task. When you fail to balance constructive criticism with positive affirmations, you run the risk of alienating your employees, sometimes for good. Giving critical feedback without causing defensiveness is a skill that can be developed, but it takes practice and a commitment on your part to make it effective. The five-step feedback process is a good place to start.

Step 1. State the purpose of the meeting.

Step 2. Discuss the problem with specifics.

Step 3. Develop ideas for improvement.

Step 4. Agree on an action plan.

Step 5. Close by asking the employee to summarize the discussion.

### IN SUMMARY

Employees who are aligned with your business and its purpose feel a challenge in their work, have a strong sense of camaraderie, enjoy taking responsibility for outcomes, experience growth as a member of your team and tend to make a commitment to you and your business. Every employer wants committed employees on the payroll, but it has to be earned through respect and

the actions you take to show your employees that they are important to you. Some might say that it is a “work in progress.” Downsizing, reorganizing, requesting employees make changes, promoting one employee over another, among

many other things can impact loyalty. Start by hiring the best and brightest people. Never rush into hiring just to fill a vacancy on your organizational chart. Once hired, orient them to your business, lead by example and treat them like your

best customers.

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