
COLUMNS: RELUCTANT EMPLOYEES

Building a business in a competitive environment, generating respectable profits and having fun while doing it can be daunting. Of course, you might be fortunate enough to have a wonderful product or service, a competitive advantage and a strong financial position.

But if everyone on your team is not pulling in the same direction, you also have a major daily headache: the reluctant team player.

Generally, the reason you tolerate the headache is that he or she is considered critical to your success because of certain skills or expertise that person possesses.

Before you get totally frustrated and suggest the employee should pursue her or his career somewhere else, you should attempt to get them on track with the rest of the team. However, unless you approach your employee-salvation project in a prudent manner, it could become a painful exercise in futility.

Doing it right requires planning, patience, persistence and a sense of humor. A sense of humor is needed so you don't lose your grip during the inevitable frustrating times.

Share the big picture

Certainly you want to share your business's values, philosophy, goals and annual objectives with everyone, but most particularly with your reluctant employee in a manner that he or she will not misunderstand.

Values and philosophy serve as guidelines for everyone's everyday actions and decisions. When the inevitable occurs and people go "out of bounds," remind them that the company's guidelines apply to everyone and that everyone must abide by them.

Additional guidelines involve the business's goals and objectives. Company goals are general in nature, while objectives are more specific, measurable and time-specific. Goals are the beacon for the future, as in "improving customer service," "strengthening relations with our major accounts" or "achieving worldclass status in. ..."

Complementing the business's goals are the annual objectives that can be broken down further for each department and for each individual. Goals provide a sense of direction and purpose, while objectives are benchmarks for measuring progress.

Once you clarify and communicate the general goals and specific objectives, identify the business's opportunities and the potential threats that might inhibit achievement of your objectives. Share the excitement of the opportunities while tempering it with the realities of the threats.

Obviously, not having everyone in the business operating from the same page is a real threat. Continually stress the importance of working as a unit to achieve the company's annual objectives. When everyone pulls together, everyone's job becomes easier.

Present worker a win-win scenario

In our minds, we all continually wrestle with the same question: "How will I benefit from this?" Expect that each of your employees will be thinking this, and don't let it bother you, because it's totally natural.

Learn the career goals of your key individuals. Even if they claim to have none, they really do. It's up to you to listen over time and put the subtleties together. You even may need to help the individuals verbalize their dreams and aspirations.
After learning what your employees want from their careers, help them realize how they might benefit by assisting with achieving the company's objectives. Once people understand how they personally can benefit, they will be inspired to act.

Link, and possibly intertwine, the individuals' career agendas with the company's agenda of achieving annual objectives.

**Define the worker's responsibilities**

Think through what actions and subsequent results are desired. Write them down, date them and put them in your drawer. Return to them in a few days and read them again.

If they are the least bit fuzzy, adjust your verbiage so the responsibilities and desired results become as clear as a pristine mountain stream. Focus on defining general actions that are aligned with specific results.

While clarifying the roles and responsibilities, don't get hung up on being so specific that you develop daily and weekly "to do" lists. These lists don't work and will only serve to frustrate management and employees.

Rather, clarify responsibilities while leaving it to the individuals to determine the styles they prefer. Of course, the various styles must comply with the openly communicated company guidelines - i.e., values and philosophy.

**Provide support and accountability**

The reason for not dictating style is that the bottom line is for the employees to succeed in achieving the desired results agreed to in advance. Stress management's concern for employees to "win" and offer to help them win. Encourage training when applicable.

Serve as a role model regarding work ethics and team interactions. Use the power of your position to run interference when needed or to obtain needed resources.

Invest time and energy in helping employees win. Everyone wants to savor the sweet taste of success. When the reluctant employees observe others succeeding, if the reluctant employees have any sense of personal pride, they certainly will seek to share in the benefits of succeeding.

On the other hand, if an employee has no pride or desire to excel, you really must question the value of having them on your team.

Let's be honest. Reluctant employees always will pose challenges. It's primarily a matter of how you communicate and coordinate management's guidelines with the employee's desire to make positive contributions to the team.

And ultimately, it's the measurable, overall results that really matter.

By JIM BRADY

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