

Great Employees Require Great Employers

By Chris Grimm, Former Director of the Southeastern Community College SBDC

Securing and retaining great employees starts with good recruiting and excellent hiring practices, right?

Wrong! It starts way before that.

Are you having trouble getting good employees? Do you have a high turnover rate? What is the morale level of your employees? Like a lot of problems that we face, the best place to find answers is with an honest self-assessment of ourselves, or in this case our business. What is it like to work for your organization?

If our car develops a problem, we take it to a professional to diagnose the problem and suggest a solution. If we are sick, we go to our doctor to diagnose the condition and suggest a cure. The same should be true for our business. Start with good data. Take a survey. Have an employee(s) with good co-worker rapport do the survey or better yet, hire an outside consulting firm-- a third party that promises confidentiality will remove employees' fear of reprisal for honest input.

Check out The Business Research Lab at www.busreslab.com. They have a sample survey online you can download. To get to the root of the problem you will need to listen closely to what your current and even past employees have to say.

Ask how your employees feel about company culture, communication, pay levels, benefits, empowerment, training, etc. The answers to these questions are the symptoms that can point you to the core problems.

Prior to taking the survey, explain how the data is going to be used. If you are not ready to make changes, don't bother to ask your employees for their input. Most likely, you will uncover a number of issues that will take time to remedy, but if your employees see that you are serious and are moving in the direction of positive change they will tend to be patient and cooperative.

Good employer and employee relationships, like all good relationships, are built on trust. If this trust is seriously damaged, then it is up to the employer to take steps to rebuild trust. Of course employees also have a responsibility to respond to sincere efforts on the part of the business owner.

As issues are identified and changes are implemented, over time your business will become known as a good and maybe even a great place to work. Remember that even though you experience this level of success, employee satisfaction is a continuous process requiring unremitting effort.

After you have addressed the basic needs of your employees, as defined by the survey, consider what unique benefits could set you apart from all the rest. Think, brainstorm, be creative and develop some great benefits that help people deal with their life inside and outside the work place. People today, more than ever before, need help balancing their home and work lives. Could you offer flexible schedules? What about being involved in day care? If your business has day care, does it provide outstanding care? There is no faster way to prove that you really care about your employees than to care about the hard issues they face outside the work place.

Every year Fortune Magazine (www.fortune.com) publishes the 100 Best companies to work for. Although many small businesses cannot compete with some of the financial perks offered by most of the companies on this list, they can get creative and develop a lot of great benefits for their employees. Small perks at work can make a difference, like CDW Computer Centers provides free bagels and fruit every Tuesday and Thursday, plus free ice cream in the summer. How about allowing an employee to use some or all of their paid sick days to care for an ill child?

Finally and maybe most importantly, be genuine! Before it becomes real to your employees, it must be real to you. You must truly believe that your employees are your partners and without them it simply would not happen. Start with a paradigm shift that pervades all of your business decisions. Before making any decisions ask yourself "How will this affect my employees (business partners)."

Now you can secure and retain great employees.