

The Secret To Keeping Customers

Turnover is a fact of business life. A recent study showed that the associated costs of replacing each employee costs a company 29 to 46 percent of his or her salary! In today's world of 1 to 1 marketing and customer relationship management, it is essential to reduce turnover to help key employees nurture successful business relationships with customers. As many businesses wrestle with changing from a company based organization to a customer-based organization, employees face accountability, technology and behavioral challenges that must be addressed by management.

Why do people leave their jobs? What types of support and process changes do we need to implement to make it easier for valuable people to stay on the job? Do your people have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet your customer service goals? Are employee expectations being met?

There are three major ways organizations can answer these difficult questions.

Whether spoken or unspoken, your expectations have a powerful impact on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and are the key drivers of your attitudes. Your attitudes in turn, influence performance, commitment and job satisfaction. Research by Inscape Publishing Company, February, 2001 shows that when companies implement clearly defined, well-communication expectations, their employees are happier, more fulfilled and more successful. Without a clearly defined mandate, many employee expectations go unspoken or unrealized. Questions like, "Will my supervisor support a balance between work and my personal life?" "Can I get flexible work hours, now that I have a child," "Will my job be secure as long as I do my job well?" Unless these expectations are managed properly, workplace satisfaction will be adversely affected.

Employers should make the work environment comfortable enough so that employees can express their expectations openly and honestly. What expectations do employees express openly about your company's structure, diversity tolerance, recognition for a job well done, autonomy to make decisions and feel valued, environmental concerns, freedom of expression about their roles and beliefs, teamwork and job stability? Are employees comfortable enough to express their opinions openly? Are you then meeting these expectations? Or are they unspoken and unmet, leading to frustration and eventual turnover?

An open, sensitive work environment, where people understand each other and work together is another key to keeping valued employees. Learn how to recognize different behavioral styles and you'll be on your way to understanding your boss's behavior, your team's behavior and your own way of getting things done. Build rapport with fellow workers, employees and customers to insure your customer service message is getting through to everyone. Do you tend to focus on details while your boss can't seem to follow through on his promises? Do members of your team want to just keep the status quo while others are constantly demanding change? Understand, that people like people who are like themselves. Your customer service and sales departments can build rapport quickly by practicing good rapport skills and understanding that the people they work with are not "good" or "bad" because they behave in a certain way. That's just their "style."

Management's role in creating a customer-focused culture must be consistent, planned and clarified. They must make sure that the way they measure and reward employee success is consistent with their customer service goals. You can't expect customer service reps to get off the phone quickly and at the same time begin to build healthy relationships.

Clarify the purpose of becoming customer focused. Each employee should know what role they play in developing and implementing this new customer focused strategy. Internal research must determine what loyalty implementation methods are working and which are not.

Encouraging employees to be open and honest about their expectations, researching what they are truly feeling, establishing consistent guidelines and training employees in understanding diverse behavioral styles in building rapport, reduce the risk of losing key employees in today's volatile work environment.

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