
It's All About People — *All The Time*



by BILL BROOKS

I recently served on a panel of business observers, writers and consultants. All of us were asked similar questions, and I was struck by the sharp differences in the answers. I was more struck, however, by the similar answers to this one, single question: “What problems do organizations call you in to fix most often?”

The answer to the other questions ranged all over the place with the exception of the answer to this single query. The answers were unanimous — it's people problems! This is particularly true in two very specific areas:

- Sales
- Service

The reason for this? Both of these critical business functions are driven primarily by the mindset, perspective and abilities of the

people who perform the activities. Granted, you can provide people with better tools, improved systems, enhanced delivery methods, improved facilities and all the rest. But the bottom line is very simple: good people get good results, better people get better results and superior people get superior results. Period.

Given that reality, let's take a look at some ways to guarantee that the best people are performing at their very best.

- **Be careful in selection.** Hire with great caution. Consider multiple interviews or interviewees. Utilize screening assessments and tools. Be recruiting even when you don't need people!
- **Remember the old adage, “When you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.”** I am constantly as-

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tounded by organizations that pay fortunes for facilities, supplies and equipment and then pay virtually nothing to the people who make it run.

- **Be creative with your pay plan.** Find ways to measure and reward the things you want to reward.
- **Provide meaningful, ongoing, useful, real-world training.** Don't be afraid to invest significant amounts of money in your second most valuable asset — people. Remember, your single most valuable asset is your customers — but also remember that customers will never be treated any better by employees than management treats its own employees!
- **Constantly measure, monitor and correct those things that need to be corrected.** Do your best to guarantee that salespeople and customer service people are constantly provided with the right stimulation to be successful.

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Retaining Customers

It's no secret that gaining and retaining customers is what business is all about. However, are you one of those who strictly accomplish this through advertising, machinery, equipment or facilities? You shouldn't be. The correctly turned phrase, the proper decision, taking ownership for problems, and going out of the way to do the right things can only be done by people. And, in the final analysis, those are the things that determine long-term business success — or failure.

Good people make good decisions. Properly reinforced, trained

and well-paid people consistently make the right choices. Salespeople who understand why they do what they do can usually figure out how to do it. Customer service people who understand how important customer retention is will always provide good service.

On the other hand, failure to find, reward and reinforce good people also has its just rewards. My recommendations? They are quite simple. Here they are:

- Understand that it is always people first — systems second.
- Good people will generate more business — systems can be installed to support the added volume of business.

Keep People First

The mistakes? Building infrastructure first and people second. Just start to mentally track some of the organizations that have millions tied up in buildings, equipment, supplies, debt and all the rest — and can't even field enough people to staff the place! I'll bet you've been to those businesses. Eventually, you don't go back.

Business has always been, and will always be, about people. Technology aside (by the way, designed and built by people), the future will continue that way. My belief is that organizations will never suffer from a shortage of ideas, products, creativity or processes. They will, however, suffer from a shortage of commitment to take the time, effort and care to find, train and retain the caliber of person required to sell and service the people who choose to be interested in the products or services generated by human ideas, products, creativity and processes.

There is very little doubt that there is still immense confusion about the critical role this issue plays in business success. However, with clear and logical thinking, there is also little doubt that clear answers are possible. For example, is the glass half-empty or half-full? It's always full — one-half with liquid and one-half with air! The same is true as you determine that any system needs top-quality people to run them. A business is no different!

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One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283 • Phone: (949) 859-4040 • Toll-free: (877) 626-2776 • Fax: (949) 855-2973
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