



“EMPLOYER OF CHOICE” - IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

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Before you dive into this brief article on employer of choice, consider one critical correlation between a great place to work and the degree of hospitality a guest perceives throughout their stay in a hotel or timeshare. Like a “resort of choice,” a company or business atmosphere should offer uncompromising hospitality to its employees. Sound impossible to achieve?

According to its website, Southwest Airlines received 245,895 resumes and hired 1,506 new employees in 2006 - that is more than 163 applications for each available position. Fortune Magazine has consistently ranked Southwest Airlines in the top five of the “Best Companies to Work For” in the United States.

Wegmans Supermarkets consider their employees to be its most important customers, and this attitude is obvious in its highly regarded customer service. Likewise, Wegmans consistently makes it to the America’s best places to work list by the Great Places to Work Institute and Fortune Magazine, ranking first in 2006 and second in 2007.

Hayman Island Resort, on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, encourages its employees to “own” any problem that is brought to them by a resort guest and empowers them to do whatever is necessary to resolve the guest’s problem, regardless of whether the issue is within his/her area of responsibility. It provides extensive training and cross-training plus generous recognition awards for employees who promote the resort’s customer service values.

What traits do these geographically and industry diverse employers share? The evidence seems to support the idea that the excellent employer treatment directly results in superior customer service, which in turn, leads to strong customer loyalty, repeat business and great “word of mouth” advertising -- the winning formula in business.

Let’s consider what makes these businesses successful, and what can make your organization an Employer of Choice. Here are 10 important elements for you to consider, evaluate and strengthen in order to generate the results you want:

I. Know Your Team.

Even though we all work together, how much time and effort is really expended on getting to know one another? You might be amazed to discover others’ capabilities, interests, perspectives and approaches to work and to life. When you do, you’ll appreciate the degree to which each individual contributes to the



fabric of a great team and a diverse workplace. Marcus Buckingham, author of such books as *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*, emphasizes that great managers focus on employees' strengths, not weaknesses.

According to Buckingham, the best managers share one talent – the ability to find and capitalize upon their employees' unique traits. The guiding principle is, "How can I take this person's talent and turn it into performance?" Not everyone has that talent, he notes. If he has learned anything from his years spent interviewing the best minds of the business world, it is this: truly great managers and truly inspiring business leaders are rarer than many think, but all demonstrate easily recognizable leadership behaviors.

So, how do you tell a good manager from a bad manager? To achieve their own success, they put their employees in a position where they will be able to use their strengths. "Great managers know they don't have ten salespeople working for them. They know they have ten individuals working for them. A great manager is brilliant at spotting the unique differences that separate each person and then capitalizing on them."

2. "Dare to Care."

Demonstrate that you and the management team care as much if not more about your employees as the almighty "customer." Herb Kelleher, founder and chairman of Southwest Airlines, is often quoted as saying, "Any company had better be scared about their future if they pay more attention to their customers than to their own employees."

3. Leadership Culture.

What is your organization doing to emphasize, strengthen and reward leadership behavior at all levels and in all, yes all, employees and managers? How can people be truly empowered to innovate/create, perform with accountability and share in acknowledgment for the results? To what degree is staff allowed to make decisions that may affect their workplace? Generally speaking, a "Workplace of Choice" will first be viewed as a culture of leadership.

4. Team Mentality.

"Team" is an easy word to invoke, but are the indicators of real "team" actually there? Does anyone understand

and agree on where their workgroup is headed (vision)? Do they act in accordance with common principles shared by all (values)? Are they headed the same way, every day (goals & objectives)? Are they assigned tasks and activities that are relevant and matter (alignment)? The process of creating a strong team takes time and effort, but the results can make all the difference in productivity and profitability.

5. General Respect.

Consider how easily disrespect can creep into a relationship, and often for completely unfounded reasons. Enthusiasm can wane naturally for a variety of reasons. The sting of disrespect need not be one of them. Even the most enthusiastic and committed of employees will find it almost impossible to work toward a common vision or goal when they feel disrespected.

6. Goal of Excellence.

Notice the word is not "perfection," it is excellence. Excellence is not only a worthy goal; it is a trademark of professionalism. Without that reputation, it is difficult to imagine how an organization could be considered a leader in its industry. Almost without exception, an organization that promotes quality/excellence also exudes pride.

7. Right-ordered Authority and Power.

Consider those special persons that you perceive to be leaders. These people are probably not "superheroes" but rather people that allow others to be comfortable around them, regardless of their position in life. Does their approachability diminish their authority or lessen their influence? Not hardly. Are others more likely to revere them and loyally follow their lead? You bet.

8. Growth & Development.

Does the average employee perceive that someone in management is focused on his/her growth opportunities? This can range from passing along tips and techniques to formal education or training support to achieve certifications, academic degrees and skills attainment. In the same way an organization must evolve and adapt (grow), employees respond strongly to enhancing their skills or knowledge.

9. Trust and Empowerment.

In a world where more than one person is needed to create change, produce results and respond to



customer demands, how can we be efficient or effective (two different attributes) without finding ways to trust others and empower them to do the work they need to do? Next time you hear someone use the term “micro manager” try replacing that with, “he/she doesn’t trust that someone else can do things well enough to meet their lofty standards, so they usually attend to everyone’s details.”

10. Routine Acknowledgement

It may seem that very few workplaces are structured to have more meaning for employees/management beyond just earning a paycheck. Napoleon Hill, a prolific writer, offered this great commentary on how to give people positive feedback on their contributions: “People want to know how much you care – they don’t care about how much you know.” The next time you as a customer experience superior service, consider the employee who served you and why the experience was so positive. Chances are the employer created the working environment and leadership culture in which employees are encouraged and empowered to excel.

So, is it worth the effort to become an “Employer of Choice”? Look what it can do for your bottom line!

About the Author:

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