

The Care and Feeding of Employees

7 Rules for Cultivating a Workforce of People who Like their Jobs

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Drew Carey once joked “Oh, you hate your job? Why didn’t you say so? There’s a support group for that. It’s called EVERYBODY, and they meet at the bar at 5:00 o’clock.” We laugh out loud because it smacks of familiarity. When 75% of the people in corporate America are chanting the I-hate-my-job mantra, we have to acknowledge that there are two common denominators: employees and employers. Let’s look at the latter and see how we can impact the former.

There are 7 steadfast rules for when you are committed to creating a workplace where people like their jobs:

Rule #1: Remind them

When the new job glow fades, people begin to wonder what’s in it for them. Why should they continue to give up 8-12 hours of their day for you? Help them remember – or compel them to discover – why it is that they keep showing up each day. It better be for more than the paycheck. Regularly inquire what is at stake for them personally and professionally in their job, their team, and their projects. Google encourages all employees to act as researchers, by spending 20 percent of their time on new projects of their own choosing, and to, in Google’s own words, “boldly go where no one has gone before.” No wonder Google employees are inspired to show up every day. They are reminded daily to discover the stake for themselves.

Rule #2: Develop them

People are hungry to learn and grow. Innately, they want to better themselves. So give them many opportunities to do so. When they become stronger employees, your workforce becomes stronger. From formal training to informal mentoring to peer-to-peer learning and leadership opportunities, there are many ways to develop your people. 3M, Xerox, and HP are renowned for their training programs. People are attracted to these companies because they know they will have many opportunities to develop themselves, and they stay because they have many opportunities to use those skills and talents.

Rule #3: Motivate them

Here’s the “care and feeding of employees” formula: employees are motivated in their jobs when they (1) find gratification (enjoyment!) in their work, and (2) are able to exercise their skills and talents. Notice it’s not money. Money does not cause people to like their jobs. A lack of it, however, does fuel the fire of their dislike; but money alone is not a part of the fulfillment formula. Low-paying non-profits, unpaid summer internships, and the Peace Corps are evidence that people are not motivated by money. They find fulfillment in their work and are offered many opportunities to exercise their talents.

Rule #4: Inspire them

Most employees walk around in a haze, wondering how their job fits into the bigger picture. It’s amazing how people have no clue what difference they make for a team, a department, or the company. People want to be inspired by the company they work for and their role in its success. So tell them and tell them often. Repeatedly enlighten them about the difference they make to you, their colleagues, their customers, and the company.

A manager at NYNX was beating his team up each month for sales numbers. He was stumped why the maniacal focus on numbers was not producing the same results the manager had a reputation for delivering. Reflecting back on his successful teams, he realized he had forgotten to drill into his guys the value they bring to their customers and the team, let alone the company. He changed his daily conversation and watched his team's numbers skyrocket quarter after quarter.

Rule #5: Talk to them

This one is so easy and yet leaders make it so complicated. People crave communication. They walk around wondering why their leaders implemented a new policy, changed a direction, stopped a project, launched an initiative. They just want to know why. In addition, they want us to ask them for feedback. All it takes is a conversation. Yet due to fear, hierarchy, red tape, or office politics, most leaders' lips are paralyzed. The CEO of the now-defunct Riverstone Networks was notorious for refusing to communicate with his employees. In response to a suggestion that he communicate with his employees via company-wide emails, he refused. He did not want any of them to hold his words against him. Solidifying the chasm between him and his people, he said they didn't need to hear from him; they should just do their jobs. Not surprisingly, his people didn't need his words written in an email; they turned on him anyway.

Rule #6: Empower them

People support that which they help create. Any initiative, program, or project has a better chance of success if the people who are impacted by it are also involved in the creation of it. People's pride and ego in anything they have influenced compels them to support it. They will go out of their way to prevent a failure of something they helped create. Whole Foods has this one figured out. After an initial trial phase, a new employee's future at Whole Foods is voted on by the team that will work with him or her. The individuals on the team are empowered over the decision about the people with whom they want to work. As a result, the employees support the new team members and their newly-expanded team.

Rule #7: Reward them

If people crave communication and inspiration, they are starved for recognition and appreciation. They just want to know that their efforts are being noticed and that someone cares. Employees, children, and animals are very similar – when their behavior is rewarded, it gets repeated. The Regional Manager at Motorola is masterful at this. On a daily basis he is thanking his team for their efforts, regardless of the outcome. In addition, he habitually sends emails to his boss, his boss' boss and an individual on the team, recognizing, acknowledging, and appreciating that individual's efforts with a client. This Manager never allows his ego to get in the way. As a result, the ROI on his investment of time is invaluable. Bottom Line: While the rules appear simplistic in nature and resemble basic kindergarten rules, they are easy to overlook. We often forget that employees are just people. Let's not forget that they can get a paycheck anywhere. They choose to show up at your office because at one time they felt they could enjoy their work and exercise their talents. Help them do just that and your employees will happily stop laughing at Drew Carey's office jokes.



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