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Give Employees a Sense of Ownership

By NOELLE C. NELSON

So often in life, it isn't as much what you do, as how you do it that makes the difference.



Studies show that job satisfaction among employees by itself doesn't predict productivity. It is only when job satisfaction is paired with psychological well-being at work that productivity is high. Psychological well-being at work includes a sense of purpose in one's job and a feeling of accomplishment. One of the easiest ways of supporting employees' sense of purpose is to give them ownership of their job.

Giving employees job ownership can mean putting employees in charge of how they do their job. For example, to FedEx drivers, ownership means they are in charge of figuring out how best to drive their route to serve their customers most efficiently. No one dictates to them how to do their job; they simply need to achieve their goal: get their deliveries to the right people quickly.

FedEx supports its drivers in achieving their goal: help is provided if their work gets backed up, supplies are readily available if needed; they are even given gloves if their hands are cold. Is this a profitable approach? Can you give that much ownership to employees without their slacking off (the great employer fear)? Ask FedEx. A \$1,000 investment in FedEx stock back in the late 1970's would now be worth over \$100,000.

Another way of giving employees ownership is to share information about the company--where it is headed and future challenges and objectives. When people feel they are part of the bigger picture, they feel more valuable. There is more meaning to your job when you know where and how your work contributes to a better result for customers. A lack of information is the same as saying "There's no need for you to know this. You don't matter."

For example, the customer service rep for an on-line catalog company who deals with customer questions and complaints on the phone doesn't mind the complaining callers because she likes dealing with people, even cranky ones. She minds never being told in advance when new catalogs are coming in and others going out. When she asks about company plans, she resents being told, "You're here to answer customer questions and complaints. You don't need to know anything else." She doesn't like being dismissed and demeaned. As a result, her morale suffers, along with her performance and thus company's profits.

A clothing manufacturer shares information in an informal way. Every Monday morning, all employees from designers to drivers, gather for a meeting. The CEO shares what is planned for the coming week. She may also talk about what orders just came in or how the company's bidding on a great new fabric. She shares the not-so-good news too--when a contract didn't come through or there were more returns than expected. She never blames, she simply shares with her employees in an honest style. The result? Motivated employees believe what they do matters.

Sharing information empowers employees; they feel worthwhile because they are being trusted with information beyond their immediate scope. Valuing your employees in this way supports good teamwork and facilitates cooperation.

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