

BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY BY CARING ABOUT EMPLOYEES

If you're looking for loyalty here are 21 Tough Questions you should be asking about YOUR workplace

More and more these days, managers are concerned with worker morale, after more than two decades of mergers, acquisitions, restructuring and downsizing we are finally beginning to notice that stressed-out, burned-out employees are not exactly able to provide world-class continuous improvement and dazzle-em-with-delight customer care. As customer loyalty (a highly profitable strategy) becomes harder to capture we need to start paying a great deal of attention to the work environment we provide for our workers, that is if we want to keep *them*, and the customers happy. Businesses all over America are waking up to the notion that in order for employees to provide the level of "caring" they want the customers to experience, companies had better start caring more about providing a work experience that is rewarding and even fun.

Little by little, as we dismantle the hierarchical "institutional" environments of business past, and managers get closer to their workers as well as their customers, the workplace is becoming more humane. And empathy begets empathy. When workers feel their needs are met, the easier it is and more willing they are to meet the needs of the customer.

I say, "If you want to create more value in the marketplace, you need to create more value in the workplace." So here are 21 Tough Questions for you to take to your next management meeting to raise the issues and raise the consciousness of your organization.

Pick one or two or ten and use them provocatively to stimulate thought and even a little conflict - get the blood going. Remember, a "21st century mind" questions old assumptions and models and looks for ways to continuously improve. The questions:

1. Is the level of trust in our organization high or low?
2. How do we help individuals cultivate a feeling of pride in their work?
3. When we delegate responsibility, do we also delegate authority along with it?
4. Is a participative process in place that encourages employees' input in matters that effect their future?
5. Knowing that creativity and innovation are critical in a globally competitive economy, is training and development an important part of our strategic plan?
6. What methods do we use to show people we appreciate them and their work?
7. What mechanisms are in place to reward the kinds of customer-caring behavior we want to see repeated?
8. Do employees really believe that open and honest communication on their part will not damage their careers here?

9. What are we doing to encourage people to constantly think "continuous improvement"?
10. What flexible work practices are in place to accommodate workers' growing need for family balance? Are people able to use these options without fear of recrimination? Are people who believe balance is important still considered serious candidates for advancement?
11. What are the five most important values in our organization? How do they get demonstrated by our management and staff every day?
12. On a scale of 1-10 how much real, honest-to-goodness fun are people having in your organization?
13. What 5 things do we have in place to support wellness in our organization?
14. What are we doing to foster "emotional literacy" in our management team?
15. If we ask our employees to take risks are we wholeheartedly accepting their failures (learning experiences) as well as their successes?
16. Do we really believe our employees are capable of being fully empowered? If not, what's missing?
17. Are there negative consequences when someone makes the decision to please the customer rather than please the boss?
18. Have we changed our corporate definitions of success to encompass the non-monetary things like job satisfaction and individual growth, how do we measure it?
19. Have we recently surveyed the staff to find out how they really feel about working here and whether or not they really have what they need to take "exquisite" care of the customers?
20. Many changes have occurred over the past few years, both reactive and proactive, what are we doing to support the people who will be upset by the changes? What system do we have in place to help people through the change process?

And here is a one more question to upset your next management meeting:

21. If the most important factor in gaining a customer's loyalty is the "customer experience," their perception of the value received, what are we doing to coach our team to the highest level of skill necessary to create that branded experience consistently? The challenge of leadership is really to ask the right questions rather than have the right answers. This should give you a good start. Remember, if you want to create more value in the marketplace, you need to create more value in the workplace. Go to it.