



EffortlessHR August 2008 Employer's Advantage Newsletter



FYI – For Your Information - Handling Different Types of Employee Situations

This month I am offering you some tips and ideas on how to handle difficult or special situations with your employees.

The Employee Who is Failing

- Don't be reluctant to bring it up. Usually the employee already knows and would welcome the opportunity to get it out in the open.
- Help the employee start talking by asking open-ended questions about the problem.
- Coach the employee to solve his or her own problem.
- Be sure the employee is aware of the consequences of poor performance. This may take the form of a verbal warning.

The Angry Employee

- Diffuse the employee – let him or her blow off steam.
- Listen empathetically but don't evaluate. Don't get angry yourself.
- Use open-ended questions and reflective listening skills to identify hidden feelings and attitudes.
- Don't hold a grudge.

The Employee Who's Just 'Getting By'

- Performance is not entirely satisfactory but is not clearly failing.
- Use listening skills to focus the interview on his or her feelings about the job.
- Clarify standards and expectations.
- Mutually develop a plan for improvement.
- Reinforce the employee's strengths.
- Set a follow-up date.

The Employee Who Wants Too Much

- Review the compensation and remind the employee that raises are given for real merit at regular intervals.
- Assure him or her that promotions are also rewards for good performance over a period of time —perhaps years. Stress the need for establishing a good track record.
- Make no promises and be sure no commitments are inferred.
- Give him or her a realistic picture of future prospects.

The Employee Who Wants to Quit

- Find out why. Maybe her or she just wants to air a grievance.

- If a real problem exists, mutually explore alternative solutions. Agree on one, and establish a schedule for follow-up.
- Set up another session specifically for career counseling, and ask the employee to give some thought to career goals in the meantime.

The Employee Who Wants to Improve

- Mutually develop a plan of action with realistic goals.
- Help the employee identify sources of self-development.
- Establish a regular follow-up schedule and reinforce improvement as it occurs along the way.
- Coach the employee in areas where improvement is still needed.

The Silent Employee

- Use open-ended questions to encourage the employee to talk – “What do you think of ...”, or “What are your plans for ...”, “How do you think we should ...”
- Use other reflective listening techniques to encourage openness.
- “ Do not feel obligated to fill silences.

The Employee Who Won't Agree

- Ask questions to generate as much data as possible. Find out why he or she doesn't agree instead of trying to prove him or her wrong.
- Look for agreements in terms of results and consequences, and build on them.
- Restate whatever small agreement is there to keep a positive attitude and let the employee know you are interested in further agreement.
- Do not argue or lose your temper.
- Be willing to change if you are proven wrong.

Lola Kakes
 CEO, EffortlessHR
 7670 E. Broadway Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85710
 520.546.3947
lola@effortlesshr.com
www.effortlesshr.com

FROM JIM SIRBASKU'S DESK

Winning the Gold with Vision, Chemistry, and Balance

In the race to lure talent to our organizations and make ourselves more competitive in the global marketplace, we need to make sure we maintain a careful balance in our teams. Anyone who believes that star talent alone will lift an organization to top performance need only look to the Olympics, where teams have failed to bring home the gold in recent years. This year, our country sent a brand-new Dream Team to Beijing – some are calling it the Redeem Team, on a mission to redeem the U.S. reputation as a basketball powerhouse.

Top basketball *players* competed in the 2004 Olympics and even in the 2006 World Games, but the *teams* did not appear. A key ingredient was missing: the chemistry that smoothly blends a group of stars into a unified whole. Uneven team play by superstars led U.S. planners to build a foundation for 2008 that would send an actual team to the Olympics. The formula included rounding up the superstars (NBA elite), requiring them to play together in early qualifying matches, and, finally, making sure both defenders and shooters were part of the mix.

This is a simple formula and a no-brainer for a coach or team leader. And yet the Olympian shortcomings of the Dream Teams are but one example of how heads of organizations repeat the same mistakes when seeking the success that top team performance leads to. Instead of throwing money at the problem, they throw talent at it. And they quickly discover that a bunch of talented people is just a bunch of talented people. Players and workers need a reason for being and a plan for working together to have the beginnings of a team.

Let's look at some of the key ingredients that go into making up a team:

- *Balance*, of the kind that Coach Mike Krzyzewski attempted to bring to this year's Dream Team redeemers
- *Vision*, or a common focus
- *Chemistry* that allows team players to make progress and reach their goals because they believe in the mission and respect their teammates

Let's pretend we are advising a team leader who needs to improve the productivity of a group of talented people. Each one performs well individually, but they do not function well together. Squabbles push them off track, and meetings reveal disagreement on even the fundamental issue of how to work together. The group must complete a project that requires detailed focus and reaching regular goals along the path to completion. After meeting for several months, team members have not produced anything useful.

Using the example of this year's Dream Team, we will help the team leader assemble and shape the group into something more than just a group of individuals.

Find the balance.

The first thing the leader will want to do is discover the strengths and weaknesses of people making up the group. Assessments that review employees' strengths and weaknesses will help. The group needs a mixture of those who immediately grasp the big picture and know how to create a plan, and those whose strengths lie in checking the fine details. Additionally, the group requires performers who can help move the project along at a regular clip so that no one misses a deadline, and those who are able to hear differences of opinion and build a verbal bridge between them. In the ideal situation, the team needs to be in charge of moving itself and taking responsibility for its actions without a boss hovering nearby. Someone, or several someones, need to encourage open and lively communication.

Obviously, it is a rare person who possesses all of these strengths in equal amounts, although many people will possess some of the necessary qualities. The more likely scenario is that the team will include people good at many things and people who excel at a few things. A team leader wants to ensure that he has the right strengths for the specific project and a good mix of all necessary qualities.

After assembling our team, we will:

Share the vision.

A team must know why it exists. The team leader's job is to ensure that this knowledge is imparted, described and repeated as often as necessary to keep key players on track. If the team is just forming and/or includes new members, top management can show support by discussing and describing the organization's vision and the team's specific mission. This is a good time to let members ask questions or voice doubts, and to treat each concern or idea with respect. This is an important example to set. If members hear someone making light of their fears or playing down their ideas, they will be reluctant to speak up in the future.

Now that the team knows what it is supposed to do, we will:

Mix carefully for good chemistry.

As the team leader learned when he was checking the balance of strengths and skills, everyone is different. That does not mean the differences will not mix well. In fact, they can play off each other to create charged discussions, enthusiasm for projects, and spectacular results. It is essential that team members respect each other's differences and learn from one another. Becoming best friends at work or doing things together outside work is not necessary, but they do need to get along *at work*. The highest performing teams learn from each other, and the best team leaders find ways to coach players over the bumps that conflicts cause and use them to the team's advantage.

Even when a team is performing beautifully, it will still need coaching. Disagreements will erupt, or the waters may calm too much for progress to occur. The coach needs to monitor team balance constantly as members leave and others come in, and as the mission changes. But if the coach remembers to build the

team on a firm foundation, assembling and regrouping productive Dream Teams is not an impossible challenge.

Profiles Advantage is focusing on the five perspectives of the coach. With this message we have examined three – employee job fit, employee motivation, and compatibility between the employee and his/her work team. Upcoming themes will examine:

- Compatibility between the employee and the manager
- The employee's effectiveness as a leader

We hope you are finding the discussion beneficial and are enjoying this exploration of the leader/manager as coach.

Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International

TOP ADVICE

Why Teams Lose (Even Teams with Talent)

COACH ASSEMBLES AN ARRAY OF TALENT, RATHER THAN CONSIDERING WHAT THE TEAM LACKS. -- RESULTS:

- Everybody talks; nobody listens
- Disparate players have little in common
- Team members work on their own agendas

COACH'S DIRECTION IS HAZY. -- RESULTS:

- Individual members want to control, not participate
- Indifferent players are absent at meetings, or arrive late and otherwise disrupt activity
- Communication is poor or absent
- Performance standards are too low or non-existent

NEITHER COACH NOR TEAM PUTS ENOUGH TIME INTO DEVELOPMENT. -- RESULTS:

- Team is marching in place with no growth evident
- Goals are not set and projects do not get finished

COACH IGNORES TEAM MEMBERS' FEARS AND WORRIES. -- RESULTS:

- Communication is poor or absent
- Team members do not trust one another

First Impressions Last *

Your Image is You

"You've heard this before, haven't you?"

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

"This wisdom has been handed down for centuries, and yet we sometimes wonder: Is anyone paying attention? How often have you visited a business, a professional, an advisor of some type, only to wonder how they remain in business? Some people just don't seem to care about making an impression...a good impression, that is."

A Personal Story from Jim Sirbasku -- When Bud and I started Profiles International Inc., we rented 550 square feet of office space and sold to companies with bigger closets. We knew it was important for us to look bigger than we were, so we hired a professional firm to give us a logo that delivered an impact. We also asked them to create an image brochure to tell our story in such a way as to impress even the biggest corporations

One day, we gathered all of our printed materials: letterhead, business cards, image brochures, etc., and Bud exclaimed, "Our image is bigger than we are!" From that point forward, we made it our mission to grow the company to be as big as our image. Of course, this has become a never-ending program of reinventing ourselves by creating an ever-growing image.

Through this evolution, Profiles International Inc. has changed from a pencil and paper testing company into a high-science information company. We have employed the services of skilled psychologists who develop and improve our products. Through the Internet, our products are instantly available to customers worldwide.

Our company image is all about lasting impressions. Getting our image right is one of the most important exercises we undertake in assuring our success as business owners. Most people think their company's image is something largely outside of their control. It's not! Based on our experiences, as well as information we've gleaned from a variety of professionals, the following three steps will help you to build an image to foster the success you desire as a business owner.

Step 1. Identify the Image You Want to Project

Before you can build an image, you need to decide what image you want for your business. Ask yourself three questions:

What Image Should My Business Project?

If you were a banking institution, you'd most likely want to project conservatism, low risk and good standing. If, on the other hand, you were a Silicon Valley electronics company, you'd want to project an image of innovation and risk taking. Decide whether you want your customers to view you as innovative, reliable, conservative, bold, progressive, traditional, professional, friendly, etc. Come up with one or two words effectively capturing the image you'd like to project.

Who are My Target Customers?

Whatever else you do, you must ensure that your image closely matches the image your target customers have of themselves. Who are your target customers? Where do they currently go for advice on products and services like yours? How much do you they have to spend? Would you open a luxury hotel in a low-income area? There's simply no point in being the most expensive or best of class in your area if nobody in your area can afford to shop with you. Equally, you'd be squandering the potential (and the likely higher real-estate costs) in a high-income area by establishing a budget motel. For optimum success, be sure that there are enough of the kinds of customers you'd like to target to make the business work, and that the image you decide to project matches your target customers closely enough to attract them to you.

Who is My Competition?

Look at the image of your most successful competitors. If you have an outstandingly successful competitor, figure out which aspect(s) of their image fosters their success. Are they very reliable? Have they a strong service orientation? Have they an incredibly wide range of products? You'll want to adopt positive elements of their image, and enhance them with whatever you feel makes your business special. If your competitor offers an extraordinarily wide range of products and you do too, you can adopt that aspect of their image, but enhance it with another feature of your business. For example, in addition to the wide product range, let's say you also create a reputation for extremely friendly service. Don't try to compete with a successful competitor's image head on; find some additional aspect to make your image special, if not unique.

Step 2: Build an Identity that Projects your Desired Image

Once you know what sort of image you'd like to project, it's time to build a vehicle which will allow you to project your new image effectively.

Start with a Logo

A good identity is about consistency. All of the ways in which you communicate with your customers must have a consistent and considered look and feel. There are many other aspects to a company identity, but few are more important than the logo. When it appears over your door, on your business card, or your letterhead, in advertisements, and on brochures, your logo should instantly convey your desired image. Get professional help. Some believe that designers are very expensive to work with. This need not be so.

Besides large graphic-design studios that might cost a little more, there are many freelance graphic designers who will work with you to help you craft a logo that works well for you. You'll find plenty of designers in the Yellow Pages. Don't skimp on your logo, because poor communication of your image will cost you more than a designer.

Working with Designers

Designers are like lawyers and other professionals; they work better when you have a plan for them to follow. Before you sit down with your designer, brainstorm about the basics of your required logo. Doing so will save your designer time and save you money.

The main elements you need to think about are:

- **Taglines** Slogans often accompany a logo. We all remember "*Pepsi Cola Hits the Spot*," and Avis "*tries harder*." These one-liners are intended to enhance the message portrayed by the logo, and to make it more memorable. Developing a one-line catch phrase before meeting with a designer can make the designer's job easier.

Think of the main aspect of the image you feel sets your business apart from your competitors, and will appeal most to your customers. If you emphasize the family in your business, then your tagline might be something like "Not just a garden center – a family center." Build a six- or seven-word catch phrase around whatever is the key aspect of the image you want to foster.

- **Color**

Color is an important part of your image. Reds, yellows, oranges and other bright colors tend to suggest pioneering, trendsetting and fun; white, blue, gray and darker greens tend to suggest a quieter, conservative image. (Look at the dominant colors in bank logos.) What colors are appropriate to the image you've selected? Be careful not to be swayed by colors you like personally but are at odds with your image. A good way to begin is by thinking carefully about the sort of colors you *don't* want to use. This will be of great help to your designer.

- **Typefaces**

The image conveyed by the more formal typefaces used in newspapers is vastly different from that projected by simple cursive typefaces, which is, in turn, different from the image portrayed by heavily stylized modern alphabets. The typeface you choose is one of the strongest image cues your logo can provide. If you know what sort of image you want, your designer will be able to advise you about appropriate typefaces.

- **Graphics**

Designers are adept at producing clever graphical representations of the message you want to convey. If you decide to use a graphic element in your logo, be sure that it is easy to understand, and that the logo still communicates your message even if a potential customer doesn't get the point of your graphic. In other words, use graphics to enhance the words. Don't let the graphic dominate. It could confuse and project the wrong image.

Step 3. Once You Have Your Identity, Use It!

It's time to start using your new identity to build your image.

Use Your Logo Everywhere Your logo is at the heart of your company's identity. It must appear on all signage, vehicles, letterheads, invoices, business cards, envelopes, packaging, uniforms, anything issued by your company. Look for opportunities to use your logo in everyday situations. For example, there are many inexpensive, easy-to-use graphics programs that allow you to produce first-class marketing materials with little effort. Use them!

Be Sure that Your Employees Buy Into the Image A key to projecting a consistent image to your customers is ensuring that your employees understand the image you are trying to project, what values it encompasses, and how it translates into everything they do. This needs to be integrated into every aspect of your business, from the way you answer the telephone to the way you deal with customers.

Can I Change My Existing Image?

Absolutely. If you have an established identity that has failed to build the image you desire to the level you would like, change it. You may be concerned that some elements of your existing identity are successful in their own right, and still relevant. For example, your logo may already be quite well known, even if it's not conveying precisely the image you would like. Work out which parts of your current identity you'd like to retain, then go through the exercise of creating your identity in the manner discussed above. When it comes to logo redesign, you will find that working with your designer to come up with a new logo to fit your new idea of the identity you require, but still retaining the better elements of your previous identity, is a lot easier than you might expect.

Image is something you need to review regularly as your business grows and expands and your target customers change. Examine it regularly. Is the image you're projecting still what you need? Is the identity that got you to where you are now appropriate to future development? If not, fine-tune it.

Your business's image is one of your most important assets. The small investment of time, effort and money you make in it now will realize far greater returns long into the future. Invest in your image and make a lasting impression, a good impression the first time, every time.

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