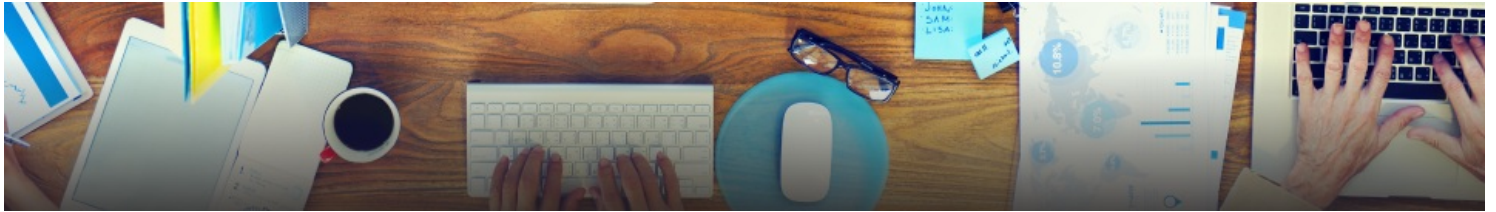


Managing a Small Business: Be a Better Boss



News

Published in Web Exclusive By Shane Dale

Last Updated on Friday, February 13, 2015

If you want to improve your leadership style and people management skills, Joel Garfinkle believes you should start by being less critical and more positive.

“A really great boss is someone who’s going to motivate you by building your self-confidence and help you grow and develop, instead of beating you down, always looking for the negative,” says Garfinkle, an executive coach and author. “Even though that sounds logical, there are many bosses out there that don’t do this. They don’t know any differently and they’ve never been taught differently.”

Could you benefit from tweaking your approach? Or would you like to train your managers to become better leaders? Here are some specific steps to take for better small business management techniques.



Set Expectations for Staff

Cut out the uncertainty. That’s the advice of Robert Wendover, author of *Smart Hiring*. “The problem is bosses don’t necessarily communicate their expectations,” he says. “They just assume that because they’re invested in the business, everybody they hire is going to be invested in the business. That creates some interesting challenges because they’ll get upset if they think a person doesn’t work as hard as they think they should.”

One way Wendover believes managers can avoid a disconnect with employees is to relay exactly how their business needs to operate to be profitable. “I say to employers all the time, ‘I dare you to walk up to the average person within your business and ask them how the business makes money,’” Wendover says. “The average person will be able to explain the business model, but they won’t know about the cost of goods, how marketing takes place, and what the difference is between marketing and sales.”

Wendover thinks once employees understand operations better, they’ll be more apt to problem solve and be more efficient. “Just by nature, they might start looking for ways to save money,” he says.

Another good reason to communicate expectations is the generational divide, with less-seasoned staff needing a bit more direction in many cases. “Younger employees coming into the marketplace are more distracted because of

digital technology,” Wendover says. “They’re a lot more externally motivated than internally motivated, which means you have to sit down and say, ‘This is what you’re going to do, and this is how you’re going to do it.’”

Offer More Praise

Garfinkle thinks complimenting employees when they meet or exceed expectations is a powerful motivational tactic. “I’ve heard many of my clients who have been managers ask, ‘If the employees are doing the job they’re supposed to do, why should I praise them?’ But even though they’re doing the job they’re supposed to be doing, people thrive on praise, recognition and acknowledgement,” Garfinkle says.

Ultimately, good managers look for opportunities to point out excellent work because the approach establishes a sense of loyalty. “People quit their jobs not because of bad pay, but because of bad bosses,” Garfinkle says. “If you want to be a good boss, that managerial relationship is an important one.”

Take Time to Listen

Along with regularly communicating with employees, Garfinkle thinks it’s equally critical to listen to ideas and concerns that staffers may have, and do so on a consistent basis. “Another important thing is making time for one-on-one meetings,” he says. “Sit down and answer any problems or challenges, and help provide employees with direction.”

How often should you hold these meetings? “These should occur weekly or twice a month,” says Garfinkle. “Talk about areas where they might need resources or support that you can help provide.”

Garfinkle suggests another key element to the one-on-one forum is creating specific objectives for each employee. At follow-up meetings, you can then discuss those objectives, in order to foster a sense of accountability.

The key, says Garfinkle, is to give feedback. “You can give negative feedback in a way that generates positive results,” he says. “You don’t want to provide criticism in front of anyone other than the person involved, so when a critique is necessary, encourage self-directed feedback as much as possible.”

Garfinkle believes bosses can phrase their questions in ways that come across as less accusatory and more inquisitive. Also, when employees critique themselves, it can be a confidence builder rather than a threat. If, for example, a major mistake was made during a presentation to a client, Garfinkle suggests you say, “You’re a creative person – what will you do differently next time? Now, you’re giving the person a chance to look at it and create their own solutions,” he says. This will avoid the initial reaction to defend themselves, which “leaves no room for positive action.”

Garfinkle thinks managers should also ask employees to name any colleagues who are doing an exceptional job and may be deserving of additional recognition. “It’s a nice little thing I’ve done over the years for my clients, and they really enjoy it,” he says.

Encourage Feedback

Good bosses make employees feel comfortable enough to critique their leadership performance, Garfinkle says. A useful, one-on-one conversation might begin with a straightforward statement like this: “I want to know what things are going well, what I can improve upon, what things I need to stop doing and continue doing, what ways I’m helping you grow and develop, and what ways I’m limiting your growth,” Garfinkle says.

In particular, Garfinkle thinks small-business owners often struggle in the area of micromanaging their employees. “You’ll notice you’re so in the details and in the weeds that you’re actually doing the work for the person. You’re not letting people develop and learn,” he says.

That's why giving employees permission to speak up when they believe their boss is micromanaging them is another element of a healthy employer-employee relationship. Get feedback from employees by providing details, specifics and support to be successful, and admit if you have a tendency to micromanage. What you're doing by putting that flaw out in the open, Garfinkle says, is giving employees permission to respond with honesty, not fear.

Find a Mentor

Besides feedback from employees, Wendover advises seeking an impartial viewpoint, too. This can come from outside of the business. "It should typically be somebody outside the organization who you can meet with for coffee once a month and talk things through," Wendover says.

Wendover thinks these kinds of mentors can be useful in pinpointing and diagnosing problems at your office, and help you understand whether the issue lies with you, your employees, or both. "If you complain about your employees too much, they might push back and say, 'Why is it that all your employees are so horrible?'" he says. "That gives the boss a chance to reflect and realize that they're not horrible. They'll say, 'Well, then why are you complaining about them so much?' It's those types of conversations that are valuable."

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