

## Help, I Hate My Employees

06/30/08

Help! I hate my employees. I used to love my business. Then I had to hire “help”. I get pulled into fixing problems, referee-ing disputes, and listening to peoples’ personal issues. At times, it seems like the fun has gone out of the business as we’ve grown. Hoping you’ll have some good suggestions.

At an economic conference last week, I heard 4 business owners all agreeing that managing employees was the least liked part of their business. Building a business you love means you have to build a team of people who truly get what you’re doing, have the skills your company needs, and who want to be part of the team that makes the company better. Periodically you have to evaluate what the company needs versus what it has, in terms of human capital. Be clear about boundaries, rules, and expectations. Remember that you do get to have final say, if you’re willing to exercise the authority that goes with being an owner.

In the beginning, the business usually needs multi-taskers – people who are willing to pitch in wherever and whenever needed. Later on, specialists tend to win the day, with advanced skills in finance, sales, operations, marketing and human resources. Sometimes vendors and employees from the early days of the business can’t keep up with

the changing nature of the company.

Owners often start out in business working side-by-side with employees. The boundaries between business and personal blended as everyone shared family and live experiences. As the business grows and gets busier, and more employees come on board, it’s not possible for the owner to be intimately involved with everyone’s lives. The focus is, and has to be, on the business’ needs.

One symptom that things are not right is that people aren’t getting to all their assigned tasks. Another symptom is excuse making, or lack of focus. Pay attention when you hear things like, “I’ll get to that tomorrow” – and tomorrow never comes, or, “We don’t really need that” – when you know you do need that, or, “It’s good enough, I don’t know what you’re complaining about”, when you know things could be a whole lot better.

How do you fix things when the symptoms appear? Evaluate people doing the tasks. Do they like learning? Or are they stuck in a rut and defending their right to stay there. Do people understand their jobs? Are people doing what they’re good at?

One of the best ways to find out how employees view their jobs is to ask them to write out their own job descriptions, making notes on

parts of the job they find easier and harder to do. Ask them to define training needs, as the size of the business increases. Then decide if their view of what the business needs matches yours, or if things need to change.

In my experience, as an owner looks into making changes, some employees will eagerly get involved, some will hang back to see if you’re serious, and some will resist changes with every fiber of their being. Your job as owner is to be clear change is coming no matter what, and to expect employees to support you and your company. Set boundaries on your time and involvement. Be clear you’re not stepping in to do their jobs anymore. You’re expecting them to get the jobs done on time, in budget. And you’re going to pay attention to who can do that, and who can’t.

Owners have to lay the ground rules. Work time is for work. Breaks are for personal time. Checking the computer for personal messages and shopping lists, phoning friends and family during work hours, focusing anywhere but on the work of the business – are all off limits. No grey areas.

Look for employees who get the importance of acting professionally at work. They come to work prepared to put in a full day. They look to be efficient and effective. They take pride in a



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job well done. They ask for more things to do. They minimize mistakes, maximize learning, get on to the next project, and make money for the business.

Get clear with everyone you have around you that you have a business to run. You expect professionalism. You expect people who can be on-time, want to grow, want to learn and stretch themselves, and who are committed to doing an outstanding job. If you have that kind of employee, keep going. If you don't, make changes. Ask people to leave. Do it with respect, but be firm – it's time to move on. After all, you as owner are paying the bills. You get to decide. Build an organization that supports you.

Looking for a good book? Try Peak Performance: Aligning the Hearts and Minds of Your Employees, by Jon R. Katzenbach.

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