

Can an easygoing manager manage the business?

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“My nature is to be easygoing. I've been told that as a small business owner that's not good. I do find that sometimes my guys will be like me - laid-back and easygoing, not so accountable. Any suggestions?”

Our No. 1 job as owner is to protect and defend the corporation. We switch from being a family member and friend to business executive and team member. Personal relationships get checked at the door. Inside the business it's all about the business.

Get Focused

Focus on skills and attitude. Are employees performing at or above standard? Do they know where they are hitting or missing the mark? Are they driven to excel? Are you? Talk about how things are going - day in and day out.

Working with friends or family? Can you both survive giving or getting critical feedback and maintain a productive personal relationship? If the answer is "no" or "maybe," think long and hard about bringing them on as employees or partners. If you're already into a troubled relationship, make changes now before it gets worse.

You are the leader of the corporation. The examples you set throughout the day speak volumes. Make sure that employees understand and respect your role as chief executive at all times.

Think through inside and outside work relationships. It helps if people view the owner as approachable. That's different from behaving as casual friends at work or blurring the lines of manager-subordinate outside of work.

Think through how information will be received and perceived before you open your mouth. Sometimes employees need to know exactly where things stand. Other times it's as important to keep our mouths shut as it is to share.

The Leading Role

As a small-business owner we work all over the company, in all kinds of roles. We need to be clear about what role we're playing at any given point in time.

As a sales person, we work with customers and prospects, get deals done and bring in work, income and profits. As sales manager we step back, meet with the team regularly, set goals and teach people to perform and be accountable. As marketer we ensure sales has enough new prospects to sell what the company already does, as we point in new directions by asking current customers what they want next.

In finance and strategy we give employees a picture of where the company is going and how it intends to get there. We use financial tools to analyze what works and point out what needs fixing. We have to find the balance between giving employees enough information to do their jobs well and not giving out so much that they get distracted or disrupted.

Our human resources role gets more challenging every year. Rules and regulations pile up. Each business owner has to figure out how to be on top of the HR game.

In operations we need to understand what drives quality. We need to lead people to improve. We enforce the standards our customers expect of our company.

Think Long-Term

Senior executive means weighing the greater good versus individual benefit. That's where core values, discipline and codes of conduct come into play. Tolerate bad behavior in one employee and it begins to eat away at the heart of the organization. Great executives are focused on honesty, responsibility, fairness and integrity as well as overall performance.

By now, you may be saying, "How am I going to do all that?" I just have a small business, some employees, customers and prospects. You're making it sound so complicated. Think about this. There's a difference between building a long-term business that has exit value, and working harder than you have to, making less than you can and leaving a lot on the table when you exit. The difference in outcomes depends upon how you approach your role as owner and business executive every day, every week, every year.

Looking for a good book? Try "Management Skills For New Managers" by Carol W. Ellis.

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