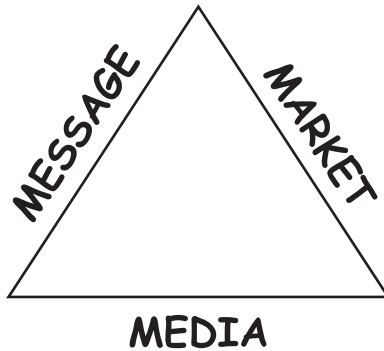


Avoid Employee Sabotage: Getting Employees on the Same Page



Here's a nasty little "secret" that isn't much of a secret. Every business owner knows it, but most prefer to ignore it, like ostriches with their heads buried in sand, or indulge in denial, preferring to believe that these kinds of problems only happen in the other guy's business. But here it is: In 99.9 percent of all businesses, the owner's Ultimate Marketing Plan, the effective advertising, is undermined and sabotaged by the employees!

I want to try to give you some fresh, provocative perspective on this.

First, your employees are MEDIA, just like your Yellow Pages ad, Web site, sales letter, and store signage. They convey marketing messages a myriad of different ways, in their attitude, dress, personal hygiene, body language, smile, adherence to scripts for answering the phone, greeting customers, upselling, enthusiastic support of offers advertised, and on and on. When they are on board and operating in a way that is totally congruent with your marketing, they can have enormous positive impact. But when they are not on the same page—when, behind your back, they are deviating from your prescribed ways of doing things—they can destroy your business. You have to *make them* congruent. You must tolerate nothing less.

Second, a lot of your headaches, frustrations, and disappointments with your employees are your fault, not theirs. Business owners have naive, unrealistic, and unreasonable expectations about their employees and employee behavior. Because the owner thinks about his business all the time, it's hard for him to remember that his employees think about it as little as possible!

My good friend and business colleague Lee Milteer, a business and performance coach to entrepreneurs, provides a comprehensive system for getting owners and managers and their teams working together. She counsels the owners via telecoaching sessions. She provides support to the staff via audio programs and other resources. She has worked with some of the best big companies in America, including FedEx, Disney, and the NASA space program, as well as thousands of small businesses. More than fifty different leading consultants to different industries enroll all their business-owner clients in her Millionaire Mindset Coaching Program, and as of this writing, its participants number more than 15,000. I've asked her to contribute a few comments to this chapter, so the rest of this is from her:

You invest a lot of time and money in advertising and marketing to make the phone ring or make new customers walk in the door. The bad news

is, all too often, that money and effort goes right down the drain because you have not taken the time to educate your employees—who interact directly with those customers—on what marketing is being done, why it's being done as it is, and what you expect to occur. You leave the employees unprepared and in the dark, they resent it, and they strike back. Sometimes, with visible rebellion. Sometimes, with secret sabotage.

Further, even if you do lay out exactly the way you want your advertising, marketing, sales, and customer service to link seamlessly together, and you do train your people on what is expected of them, your intentions will never come close to the reality that occurs and that customers experience if you fail to supervise and police.

Think about the last time you walked into a store or other place of business and saw the big sign that says: Our Customers Are The Most Important People On Earth! Yet twenty minutes later you are still vainly searching for someone who works there to help you. Three clerks are clustered together in a conversation with each other. When you do get one to pay attention, the clerk's blatant lack of interest turns you off. You are clearly an interruption, a nuisance.

These problems begin with employees getting “what to do” training but never getting “how to think” training. By that I mean, “right thinking.” People have to be told, taught, and motivated to think about their jobs, their customers, their roles, and themselves in a way that will support your intentions and objectives.

The idea of “ownership mentality” is a myth, impossible to sustain. You need to face the fact that employees cannot and will not think like you think, or think like owners think. If they did, they'd be owners. They are going to think like employees. And if you're not careful, they will think like the worst employees think. *It's no skin off my nose if that customer leaves frustrated or angry and goes someplace else—my paycheck's the same at the end of the week. These customers keep interrupting my work. The owner is an idiot. Our prices are way too high.* These kinds of things are heard behind owners' backs constantly.

In many businesses, the employees are actually running the show. Dan Kennedy tells me of business owners who abandon great marketing plans with the explanation: *My employees won't do it. My employees don't like it.*

You have to adopt the “there is a new sheriff in town” mentality—put on your badge, take control of your business, and be a real leader. This involves several different roles. Leadership is the development of marketing, of sales, and of customer service plans and procedures, laying out the vision, the goals, the way things are to be done. Training is teaching, coaching, helping people understand and adopt the practices you want used. Supervision is being a cop—frequently, constantly checking up, to see that things actually are being done as intended. For training to be effective, it needs to be an ongoing process, not a one-time thing nor an occasional, erratic response to things gone awry. Layered on top of that, both managers and staff need “mindset training” to help them handle stress, be better communicators, value teamwork, and take pride in achieving goals.

Most business owners invest the least time and money in their people, who have the direct personal contact and influence with their customers, clients, or patients. Instead, they invest most of their resources in their facilities, equipment, products, and advertising and marketing. But the return on all those other investments actually hinges on the performance of the people!

Resource!

For information about Lee's *Small Business Guide to Employee Effectiveness for Owners and Managers*; the *Keys to Performance Excellence and Career Success* employee kit; training programs, seminars, tele-coaching, and private performance improvement coaching for entrepreneurs, go to www.milteer.com.
