



**YOU'VE GOT THEM, NOW MOTIVATE THEM!**

I was recently talking with several people concerning the jobs they were working at in a direct marketing business. After a short time, the conversation turned from what the job entailed doing, to the sense of frustration they felt because of the feeling of being miscast in their roles in the business.

They agreed they brought a number of valuable talents and experience to the table that management was either overlooking or downplaying. Often they felt they were being asked to work on tasks that had utilized their skills in only a minor way or that could be collectively accomplished by one person in the organization.

Their underlying concern was that they felt a close allegiance to the business and had a strong desire to see it grow but weren't being fully utilized to accomplish what they perceived should be a shared goal, common to both management and employees.

Several times in the conversation, the issue of good leadership was raised and what attributes they felt were critical in a good manager. Characteristics such as being approachable, fair, supportive, resourceful, setting attainable goals, being reliable, and having the ability to motivate were mentioned. They also felt a manager should be able to see the "big picture" and translate it into a version that employees could work toward in their daily activities in the business. They further states that a top-quality manager should be a good communicator and ask for ideas, opinions, and comments from employees and encourage employees to ask the same of customers when appropriate.

So as a business manager or owner, what value do these comments have to you? First you need to recognize that if you have one or more good, quality employees, you work toward retaining them in a variety of ways. A top-producing employee is an investment of

both your time and money. Stop and think for a moment how much mental time you spend replacing people when they leave and just getting back to a level of status quo in your business.

Next to dealing with environmental and zoning issues, finding labor in an agricultural business is the top complaint of owners. The hours usually aren't pretty and it's tough competing against other non-ag businesses on pay scales.

You have already surmounted these two issues with the people working for you or they wouldn't still be there. In fact although money is critical, survey after survey conducted with employees points to the fact that they rate high wages below such items as being appreciated, feeling they are a part of decisions that affect them or their job, the work being interesting, job security, and a manager being approachable on personal issues.

It's interesting to note that similar studies of managers illustrates the opposite is true. Money and growth (personal and company) are ranked highest. The lesson learned is that you think differently than those who work for you and you need to see that as a challenge to work through.

It's often said being a good leader is an art form. To get there, you need to learn to read your employees, finding

the common ground between you, and working toward the same end. You want to develop a sense of ownership in your employees.

A landscape business owner recently related a personal experience to me. He talked of being in a men's restroom at a rest area along the highway washing his hands, when a boy in his late teens came in, used the facilities, and then proceeded to pick up paper scattered around the floor on his way out. The boy was a traveler passing through but demonstrated a sense of ownership by his action.

The businessman stated that ownership is the most important skill a manager can develop in an employee. It retains employees, prevents broken machinery, stops theft, and provides the best customer service possible. The best employees will scrub bathrooms, unload late deliveries, harvest on wet days, and even cheerfully deal with unhappy customers if you continually "read" them and provide the motivation they need.

Find and exploit the strengths of your employees instead of focusing on their weaknesses. Often the weakness of one is the strength of another and tasks can be assigned in that manner. Managing that way will create a stronger, stable, and more satisfied workforce. That in turn creates a happier owner/manager and a potential increase in the bottom line.

**I Know You're In There!**

**How Can I Be The One To Feed You?**

I have been asked a number of times this spring by growers of food crops how to break into the market of selling products in school settings. Actually the question should be larger, and asked as: "How can I sell my products to institutions?"

That's because other groupings of people are equally important as a market for your products. Don't overlook local, state, and federal prisons in your area, colleges, senior centers, health care facilities, nursing homes, and other similar locations. There are a lot of facilities probably within a short distance of your business that are purchasing products similar to yours, from companies out of the area. This can be a good market once you profile the institutional customer and learn to provide the right product.

I was speaking to Dan Schofer from USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service recently about a project he worked with in Florida dealing with a similar scenario. This was not just survey stuff. It was a real, in the field, hands-on effort between growers, school district buyers, and marketing researchers. It involved a group of growers looking for methods to get their products profitably into the kitchens of local schools on a routine basis. He offered a number of good suggestions

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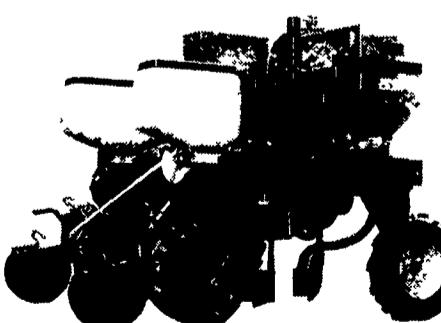
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