

SELLING POINTS

Feedback, whether you're giving it or receiving it, can be a powerful tool. It can also be misused, unfortunately, to deny, minimize, refute, retaliate or over-analyze. In extreme cases, it can alienate others with an all-or-nothing tone.

When giving feedback, be honest but empathetic. No one likes to hear criticism, even if it is the truth. Be as positive as possible and give praise whenever appropriate. Find agreed-on action items and create mutual accountability to ensure that they are followed up on.

When receiving feedback, it's also important not to become defensive or personalize the critique. Here are some quick guidelines for getting the most out of your feedback sessions:

- See opportunity, not blame.
- Recognize that, for the person giving the feedbacks, perceptions is reality.
- Seek clarification.
- Look for positives.
- Implement the suggestions for improvement.

Regular employee "tune-ups" key to success

by Connie Brubaker

My employees are driving me nuts! I'm spending so much time dealing with employee issues that I'm losing focus on important business issues! Why can't so-and-so just do their job?



Connie's Comments

I hear laments like these all the time as I work with managers and their teams. And believe me, I sympathize — I once had 50 employees to take care of, and despite six managers to act as buffers, still felt the burden of constant personnel issues.

Managing employees, I realized, is a lot like owning a car. I love the freedom and convenience that my car gives me. But that doesn't just happen. I have to regularly fill it with gas, change the oil, add water and transmission fluid, even put air in the tires. And, of course, there's periodic heavy maintenance: rotating the tires, replacing belts and filters, occasionally fixing parts that go bad with enough wear and tear.

Properly maintained, a car can provide years of durable and enjoyable service. But slack off on the maintenance

and you'll see your fuel efficiency dip, your failure rate increase and your safety level drop.

Sometimes, I think we "drive" our employees without providing the maintenance they need to continue at peak performance. Are you fueling them with encouraging words? Do you call attention to the things that are important in their lives: birthdays, accomplishments outside of work, anniversaries?

So often we hear that employees these days are "disengaged." What are you doing as a supervisor to stay engaged with them?

Once Southwest Airlines CEO Colleen Barrett called into her office an employee who had been featured in a number of customer complaint letters. Before blasting her, Colleen simply asked if everything was OK — at which point the employee broke down into tears. She described the pain of a recent divorce and custody fight and, on top of everything else, a \$1,800 legal bill she couldn't afford to pay.

A few hours later, the employee re-

continued on next page



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In this issue of SOLUTIONS:

- Employee training and tune-ups
- Selling Points: Giving and receiving feedback
- Spring workshops



"And if you're not 100% completely satisfied with our product, remember that a little disappointment is good for building character."

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Connie Brubaker is a certified Integrity Systems® business consultant and professional speaker who focuses on sales, customer service and leadership.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

— Henry Ford

Investing in employees benefits bottom line

continued from page 1

ceived an envelope with \$1,800 drawn from Colleen's personal account. As she described it, "At what other company could you walk into the CEO's office thinking you're fired and walk out feeling so cared for?"

We spend huge sums of money to maintain the technical equipment our businesses depend on. Why not spend a little to keep an even bigger investment, our employees, running smoothly?

USAA, the San Antonio-based auto insurer, yearly spends three percent of its revenues on employee training. Using the same *The Customer* service training package I use, they've seen a 146% increase in their asset/em-

ployee ratio, and their turnover rate has dropped from 40 to six percent.

What's the price of not providing training? Obviously, there's the added cost of greater inefficiency, lost customers and more supervision. But I think the greater and more debilitating cost is to the psyche and performance of employees who don't feel particularly competent or confident in their ability to perform their jobs.

Most companies find that the amount of money and time they spend on payroll, benefits and training makes their staff their largest investment. So why not make sure to schedule some regular staff maintenance: training tune-ups and emotional fuel?

And please, stop kicking the tires!