

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm part of the management team for a small business and I'm pulling my hair out. We keep missing our goals and our employee morale could use a shot in the arm. Any advice?

-- Glenn

Dear Glenn,

Thousands of books have been written about organizations and management tools. Some of the most insightful and effective are those that emphasize the power of paying serious attention to the human element in achieving business objectives.

Let me focus on some fundamentals, and offer questions for reflection, with the caveat that all I can do in this short column is bring up some issues. Take a cruise through your local bookstore or library, and spend some time raising your consciousness about successful management strategies. Start by looking at the following questions designed to help you grow a healthy business with enthusiastic, productive employees:

1. Why are you in business? I'm sure making a profit is high on the list, but what is your vision? Can you clearly articulate your mission? You should be able to do this in a sentence or two. I'm assuming that your company offers a product or service for which there is a robust market. If your company is trying to sell ice in Greenland, you might want to look for another line of work. So carefully look at your products and/or services. Is there a market for your wares? Who are your competitors? How is what you offer different or better than what a consumer may purchase elsewhere?
2. What are the core values that will allow your company to realize its goals? Do these core values include a healthy appreciation of everyone at all levels of the organization? Your senior management should be able to describe these values and, most importantly, understand how to actualize those values by vibrant action steps, strategies, and tactics. This is not just "wordsmithing" at a meaningless management offsite. Rather, this exercise sets the foundation for why you are in business, and how your business will operate.
3. Take a hard look at your systems, management behaviors, pricing schedules, compensation strategies, and staffing. Do these align with your vision, mission, and goals? Disconnects between the vision and the everyday activity of an organization are high among the usual suspects when we look at why companies are not reaching their goals. It's not enough to "talk the talk" – just about everyone in management seems to be able to do that with élan. You have to "walk the talk."
4. Honestly look at your management philosophies and behaviors. Why do your employees suffer from low morale? Ask them, and give them safe opportunities to honestly share their thoughts and feelings. Let them know that you value their opinions, and that you are ready to listen. Then make the necessary changes. Let everyone know that their contribution, hard work, and

creativity are what will make the company successful and that they are valued members of the team.

5. Then reward those who are achieving their individual and organizational goals. Remember, money is not the only – or even the most important – reinforcer. Surveys have shown that recognition and “feeling appreciated” are more powerful motivators than a bonus. Make sure that you and the other supervisors are aware of this, and they take the time to let your employees know they are valued. Make it a point to “catch someone doing something right.”

It takes a lot of hard work to grow a successful business and especially in today’s challenging economy. But as a long-time Executive Coach and Organizational Development Consultant, I could tell you hundreds of inspirational stories about how even small changes – like the ones I’ve suggested to you – have propelled stumbling companies into the realization of their full potential, profitability, and a bright future.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2002 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com