



# Bluestone's Retail Strategies

by  
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## *Getting Real Results From Your Staff*

**W**hat do you want first, the good news or the bad news? The good news is that your business is better than ever. After lots of hard work, you can finally see a level of sales that could actually earn you a good living. The bad news... you need another employee to handle the work. Few issues are as universally troubling as those involving staff. Like it or not, it takes people to do the work to make your company run.

The simple truth is our goals as owners and managers are different than the goals of most of our staff. We take risk to own and grow our own business. We get bank loans, put our houses up as collateral, work uncompensated hours, and spend many sleepless nights. On the other hand, our employees answer an ad, say what we want to hear in the interview, work as hard as they feel like working, and expect days off whenever they need them.

We stay until midnight to get work done. They leave at the end of their workday. Employees can quit their job if the grass seems greener somewhere else. We couldn't quit even if we wanted. (There are leases with our name on them and bills to pay.)

So, can you really do something to get more out of your staff? Yes, you can! Managing people can be a little less of an adventure. It can be a little more sane and predictable. You can reduce staff turnover. As unpredictable as people may be, there are certain basic fundamentals of management that, when applied consistently to your staff, will result in a better workforce.

- Employees want rules and policies.
- They want to see these rules enforced consistently and fairly.
- Employees want to have pride in their work and to improve at what they do.
- Employees want to benefit from their successes.
- Employees want to see their boss as a tireless, dedicated leader.

As a boss, you must provide all of the above. You must also recognize that you have the right and the responsibility to require that all of your staff (whether it's one or 50 employees) lives by the fair and appropriate rules you have established.

### **The Employment Agreement**

When you hire a person, you are essentially creating a rental agreement: you agree to pay a certain amount of money in return for the employee doing what you tell them to. As long as what you ask them to do is legal, safe, moral, and within the general parameters of their job description, they must do what you ask. You have the right to expect (in fact, demand) performance. (Would you pay for a rental car if it didn't drive?)

Nothing in my rental agreement philosophy should be interpreted to mean that employees should be treated badly. In fact, I think that people who honor their part of the agreement should be treated very, very well. You should endeavor to be honest and fair.

### **Have Rules**

If you want people to play on your team, you have to tell them the rules. If you had never seen

baseball played and you were suddenly walked out to home plate, would you know which way to run around the bases?

The same is true of your business. Realize it or not, you have a way of doing things that is unique to your business. If you don't tell people your way, preferably in writing, then you forfeit your right to expect performance.

The same is true of basic rules. Here's a quick project for you to do. Write down the three biggest problems you have with your staff. For example:

- Do members of your staff regularly arrive late for work?
- Do they receive too many personal phone calls?
- Do they forget to clean up the work area at the end of the day?

Now, for each of these problems, do you have a written rule or policy? I would venture to guess that if there is a problem, you don't (or you do, but it's not enforced).

If you don't have a rule, now is a good time to establish one. Make sure it is clearly stated, understood, and enforced. Specify a penalty, which can include a verbal warning, a written warning, suspension, or termination.

Don't accept non-performance. Sometimes enforcing a rule carries with it the possibility of controversy and hurt feelings. As long as your rules are reasonable and fair, a little controversy today is better than long-term deterioration of order.

## Give and Get

Good work and effort should be praised and rewarded. However, such efforts are generally short-lived, unless buttressed by steadily increasing expectations of perform-

ance. There is nothing that can increase the morale of a company like a demanding, fair manager who pushes people to be their best. If you accept mediocre performance, then you will get it.

People don't come to work to be happy. They come to work to achieve their work goals, which often include learning, feeling a sense of accomplishment, being part of a team, and receiving appropriate and ever-increasing compensation.

Managers who push people to be their best and to improve constantly have an easier time providing pay increases than those who accept non-performance, only to get backed into a corner at performance review time.

## Play the Game

Staff members want you to give them a road map. They also want goals and objectives. When those goals are achieved, most people would like a sense of satisfaction, the heartfelt thanks of their leader, and some sort of additional reward. Worthwhile goals might include:

- Selling fillets on more than 50% of orders taken.
- Achieving a conversion rate of 90% or better. (See my column in the September 2000 issue.)
- Selling conservation glass on more than 75% of the orders taken.

Make sure the goals are easy to understand. An unreasonable goal is not conducive to motivation. Finally, be sure you provide training so that people have a good chance for success. When success is achieved, there should be some reward.

Rewards can be in the form of money, tickets to a movie, a gift certificate to a restaurant or the local mall, or even a day off with pay.

Rewards will cause your staff member to seek repeated success. Rewards also enforce an element of fairness in the mind of your staff. If the staff member's effort helps you to achieve your goals, then you have to give something back. After all, the manager of a Wendy's doesn't strive to achieve their goal just so Dave Thomas can drive a nicer car.

## Walk the Talk

When all is said and done, what matters most is that the boss walk the talk. If you want people to be on time, don't be late. If you demand attention to detail, then make sure you cover your own details. If you want people to work hard, then work hard. Remember, when the landing craft pulled up on the beach at Normandy in WWII, the soldiers jumped out to follow their unit leader into battle.

Managing a staff is about leading people. It involves communicating with a vision and a set of rules. Most importantly, it involves a fairness and consistency in extracting a high level of performance from all that are willing to give it and a fairness and consistency in being intolerant of those who are unwilling.

Managing a staff can only work if you build a team of people (whether one, five, or 50) that knows the mission, understands the obstacles, and is willing to play the game that it takes to win. ■

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