

Open leadership

HOW TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES FOR YOUR COMPANY'S BENEFIT

BY MARK SCOTT

Pamela Lockard never gave a lot of thought to whether her employees liked her. She had a business to run, and she didn't do it in hopes of winning a popularity contest.

But almost 10 years after she started Direct Marketing Network, now known as DMN3, she realized that a little personality might actually be a plus for her company.

"You have to inspire your employees," says Lockard, the company's founder, owner, president and CEO.

Lockard's effort to be more open and personable with employees has produced good results by getting her 41 employees to be more open with her. Revenue at the direct marketing agency rose from \$5 million in 2004 to \$11.5 million in 2007.

Smart Business spoke with Lockard about how to make yourself more human to your employees and why no idea is a bad idea.

Q. What is the key to engaging your employees?

You have to inspire. Ask people and show a personal interest in them and their families. I try to share a little bit about myself.

My husband and I recently took in a 10-year-old girl. I try to talk to people about her because I think it gives me more of a human side than I've had before.

Every once in awhile, I try to do something really funny or out of character.

It does help them feel that you're human and you're a little more approachable. I was

never concerned before about being liked. But I do think if people like you and if they feel they can relate to you, it makes coming to work a little more enjoyable.

Q. How does that interaction benefit the company?

There are some people here that have better ideas about certain things than I do. Even if I say this is the best way to do it, and they say, 'What about this?' I'm looking for the best way to do it.

It's really whatever it takes. Even though I'm the head of this and I make the final decision, there is no bad idea to throw out there.

I will listen, and if somebody else has a suggestion or a better way of doing something, you're open to doing it that way. I've always tried to communicate that to employees and not to ever fire people for making mistakes here.

Show people there are not repercussions for coming in and expressing an opinion. I'll say, 'I think that's a good suggestion; let me think about it.'

Q. How do you empower employees?

We push the decision-making and responsibility down to every person. Every person operates their own little business in a sense because they are responsible for profit and loss on every project.

We look at every job that is done and the profitability of those jobs. I hold myself

accountable, and I hold all my employees accountable.

They know they are held accountable and what's expected of them. They can make their own decision on how they do something and who they work with. But they know, at the end of the day, they know what's expected of them and that's where they need to be in the profitability of their work.

They need to fulfill the promises we gave the client, and they need to fulfill the goals



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we have. When you take it down to that level and people know you are looking at those things and evaluating, it makes a big difference.

Q. What role do you play in maintaining this culture?

It has to come from the top that this is important. I'm right in the middle of it. I'm with them. I'm sure the culture comes through to all the employees that we all work really hard. We try once a month to have an employee lunch. We try to bring people together as a group once or twice a month.

You always have to be keeping yourself a little bit ahead of the pack. I do that by reading and trying to stay abreast with what is happening in our industry so I can be perceived as a leader.

It's coming in every day and showing passion and intensity for what you're doing that you're enjoying it, and then make an effort to go around and talk with people.

Q. How else do you create a culture in which people want to be a part?

It's being a little bit more well-rounded and showing you have a heart. We do a lot of volunteer work, and I try to involve our employees. I think that makes you more approachable as a person. It makes them feel that they are working somewhere that is trying to make a difference.

I've not only taken my personal goals of trying to have a better life or do more than just work, I've tried to bring that into the business. I do think the key to my success was having another purpose besides just making money. <<

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