by Michael Rosman

Employees don't quit jobs…
…they quit bosses

Research studies by *Forbes*, *Gallup*, and *Harvard Business Review* found that between 50 and 75% of employees quit their jobs because they "don't like their boss."

Wow. Big number.

Managing a staff effectively is no small task. It requires a skill-set that matures over years, even decades. When any group of personalities is together regularly, conflict is inevitable. It can be a daunting challenge for leaders to successfully navigate these choppy waters.

How you motivate one person may not apply to another. Employee A may need regular guidance whereas Employee B may perform at their peak when allowed plenty of autonomy. We work in an environment where oftentimes the unexpected is commonplace. Amidst this organized chaos, skillful supervisors recognize that communicating the same message to different people must sometimes be tailored to individual personalities.

The best we can be

As owner-operators, managers, and supervisors we wear many hats. In a given day we may play the role of mentor, teacher, psychologist, disciplinarian, decision-maker, fact-finder, problem-solver, motivator, and mediator. To successfully build an exceptional team, consistency—just as it applies to your products and services—is the key. If your staff feels they can rely on you to communicate with them and respond to their situations in a consistent manner, you will build trust and loyalty.

If we want our employees to be the best they can be, we leaders must make the same commitment. As I regularly urge my clients, "consider your employees as a continual work in progress." The same principle applies to being the best boss we can be. There is no finish line. We are all a work in progress.

Unlike our employees, we don't have the guidance of a manager to assess our performance. As a result, being open-minded and motivated to improve your leadership skills is an important obligation you have to your business, staff, and self. This can include reading and researching this topic (there is a lot of information available), taking a seminar, and talking to leaders or human resource professionals from other businesses.

The *Harvard Business Review* conducted a study entitled: *Things Good Bosses Believe*. These were some of the findings:

- "I have a flawed and incomplete understanding of what it feels like to work for me."

- "One of the most important and difficult parts of my job is to strike the delicate balance between being too assertive and not assertive enough."

- "I strive to be confident enough for people to see that I am worthy of being in charge, but humble enough to realize that sometimes I am going to be wrong."

- "One of the best tests of my leadership—and my organization—is how things are handled after people make a mistake."

- "Because I wield power over others, I am at great risk of acting like an insensitive jerk and not realizing it."

I like the last one in particular. Our words can carry a lot of weight. One sarcastic comment, not even intended as a slight, may keep an employee up at night while you barely remember saying it.

If you want your employees to be enthusiastic, conscientious, and customer service driven, those in charge must cultivate an environment where nothing less is expected. Staff takes cues from their supervisors as they set the bar for what is and is not acceptable.

Decide what the underlying principles of working for your operation are going to be. Then live, breathe, and enforce them. Find the balance between empathizing with and coaching your employees, while creating a culture of high-standards and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

Along with showing appreciation, there are other things you can do to maximize your staffs potential. These are some suggestions:

Hold regular staff meetings. This is a great format to keep

your crew motivated and on track. Staff meetings are a time to reiterate goals, get input and feedback, air-out grievances and acknowledge those that have gone the extra mile. During the meeting, keep a written log of issues discussed and always maintain a running list of topics for the next meeting.

Understand strengths and limitations. Take time to learn and understand each employee's strengths and limitations. Most employees are best suited for specific positions—you can't force what isn't there. Also, recognize that no one who works for you is you. Stop hoping they will be.

Observe and be willing to shake things up. Because things have been done a certain way for a long time, doesn't mean it is the best or most efficient way to do it. Regularly observe who is doing what and ask yourself if there is a better way. Besides, sometimes it's good to shake things up.

Involve your employees. Remember that your staff can be a tremendous resource for feedback and information. Ask for their ideas or thoughts to make your business better and more efficient. People feel valued when asked for their opinion. Who knows better about the ins and outs of your operation than those on the front lines? I guarantee that if any of their ideas are implemented, they will have a vested interest in their suggestions' success.

Prepare and train your staff. For your employees to have the best shot at success, you need both a training system and a written job description for each position. Great customer service skills are teachable. If you want this reputation for your business, invest the time in thorough training that is documented and updated as needed.

Provide annual performance and self evaluations. A format for employees to self-evaluate their performance is a great tool. It gives both them and their supervisor an opportunity to compare their perspectives as part of a formal performance appraisal. Written, structured annual reviews offer a:

- Forum for discussing an employee's overall performance, including past successes and future areas of measurable improvement.

- An opportunity for supervisors to define upcoming goals for the employee and the organization.

- Tools for the supervisor to determine areas where an employee needs additional training.

- Measureable tool for wage and benefit adjustments.

Show interest in their lives. Get to know your staff as people, not only as employees. Are they married? Do they have kids? Do they have any difficult circumstances or life situations that you can empathize with and can help accommodate? When are their birthdays? When is their work anniversary? What do they enjoy doing when they are not working? Have they had any significant events or accomplishments outside of work? Showing interest in their lives and acknowledging benchmarks can go a long way to building a loyal team. CS

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