

Empathy: a Key Management Tool

Written by Steve Marr

Thursday, 10 October 2019 02:26

All of us like to be understood. A recent study by *Businessolver*,¹ titled “2019 State of Workplace Empathy” documented that 93% of employees would stay with an empathetic employer. Furthermore, the study indicated 82% of employees would leave their position to work for a more empathetic organization.

When you drive down the street and see help wanted signs everywhere, you recognize the critical problem that employee retention is. However, it’s not always about the money.

Scripture instructs us to “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15, ESV) Taking time for empathy is not easy. There is never enough time to get work done. However, having to replace staff requires an even greater time commitment.

A key part of demonstrating empathy means taking time to listen and not rushing to fix everything. Take time to listen to employees and demonstrate that you hear and understand their struggles.

I am involved in a damage restoration business. On several occasions we have been called upon to clean up after a suicide by gunshot. This is not a comfortable task. Still, it is something which must be done. When these unusual events come up, I could easily assign it to somebody else and send the invoice to the customer. However, in each situation I personally visited the site and supported our cleanup crew. I did this partly because I don’t believe in sending colleagues into something that I’m not willing to share. Also, as we decompress from the experience, I’m able to hear and understand their pain from the process.

When I was in the international trade business, we were extremely busy at certain times asking our production staff to work extra time including overtime on Saturday. During these periods I would make it a point to be in the office for at least part of Saturday. I wanted them to see that senior management wasn’t just assigning them work but also participating in easing the workload.

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I have written in the past how we must be empathetic to a customer's position, understanding what they need and want so we can respond effectively. Likewise, with business colleagues, we need to commit to listen and understand their circumstances especially when those circumstances are painful.

One of the best techniques I've learned from my friends in the Salvation Army is a ministry of presence. It means simply taking time to sit quietly with someone and share the painful moments. Empathy is not about fixing something for our colleagues. That not our job. Instead, empathy is listening and demonstrating a caring attitude, something Jesus demonstrated every day in his earthly ministry.

Be an empathetic manager as you build your team and your business.