!NTELLIGENCE

You Don't Have to Be Big to Be Good

By Skip Corsini

EVERY YEAR, business journals across the United States come out with lists of the best places to work in their local areas. We can learn a lot from companies that meet the criteria. In great places to work, smart leaders attract, retain, and develop their people; keep them engaged over the long haul; and then reap the rewards. Those companies realize that success is entirely dependent upon the intellect, creativity, dedication, and integrity that their people display daily.

Here is the formula for all to see: A motivated workforce stays with you and creates a motivated customer base, which will also stay with you.

For most business owners and managers, the formula is both simple in principle and a disturbing challenge. At any one time, studies say, 25 percent of your employees and, by association, 25 percent of your customers are at risk—fully prepared to jump ship. I am the father of four fine children and can say from experience that this also applies to my kids. There's always one who wants to heave overboard.

So, what's the secret? How do managers get things done *and* provide a niche for talent? How do you keep people feeling appreciated so they won't move on?

Hint: It's not always about money. I am an alumnus of a firm with a superb reputation in its industry, a generous pay scale, and a turnover rate greater than a penny slot machine. People can't wait to leave. Just like 25 percent of my kids.

Nor is the answer a laissez-faire management style, free beer on Fridays, and birthdays off. Good people are achievers. When they are "on" they will work harder than the worst boss could expect. In fact, you'll have to hose them down once in a while.

Here are some ideas to keep your people "on" for little or no money.
● Provide the right tools and resources.

Let your people tell you what's right.
● Make new hires and old ones feel welcome, with sincerity. As in courtship, we tend to let up after the initial excitement. Keep the fires burning.
● Spruce up the office. Put some stuff on the walls. Take care of the place.
● Say "thank you" over and over, in different and genuine ways.
● Make sure that the people at the bottom have direct lines of communication to the top. If not, you might as well change that at-risk figure to 50 percent.
● Route out incompetent people, especially managers. Hire for a positive attitude and then train for skills you need.
● Give new people no more than 90 days to prove there is a good match between what they do well and what you need doing. If you determine that the match isn't there, let them go right away. Any other move is mercy misplaced and will get you in trouble with the rest of your people.
● Provide a compelling vision, ambitious and achievable goals, clear expectations, and the structure people need to succeed.
● Involve your best people, at all levels, in every major decision.
● Link your employee-developed compensation plan to creation of customer value. Eliminate positions with no value. Fewer people paid more is a great concept.

Bonus philosophical throw-in: It's not what you say, it's what they hear and what you do.

Even if you only put two or three of these ideas into play, you will be far ahead of the game. Then you just have to wait for your company's name to make the list of best places to work.

Skip Corsini is a writer, coach, and consultant. He represents Dale Carnegie Corporate Solutions in the San Francisco Bay Area; scorsini@sbcglobal.net.

Scotland Invests in Computer Training

All Scottish citizens over the age of 18 will receive up to £100 to help them develop and improve their computer skills, BBC News reports. The initiative extends the benefits of the Individual Learning Account, a program that has been giving low-income learners up to £200 a year for courses.

Deputy Minister for Lifelong Learning Allan Wilson says in the BBC article, "ILA Scotland has already opened up opportunities for thousands of people on lower incomes who previously would have faced financial barriers to learning. [Now], the practical support of ILA Scotland is extended to all adults in Scotland."

Wilson reports that information and communications technology training was chosen for the universal offer because, even among those who claim basic skills in those areas, few have formal qualifications to prove their expertise.

MORE/http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/4734103.stm

The Universal Packing List

This handy web-based application lets you input details about your upcoming trip, including dates, maximum and minimum temperatures, transportation, and so forth, and it returns a customized packing list that you can print and email. It is designed more for international travel than local, but it's still a great way to make sure you remember the necessities no matter where you're going.

MORE/http://upl.codeq.info/index.jsp