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A rotten business

By Paperitalo Staff

The other morning I was taking my wife's car to have the oil changed. Since it was a weekday morning, it is not surprising that the quick oil change establishment we frequent was not busy. What was surprising was that all the workers at the facility, from manager to lowliest clean up person, were out at the edge of the street with signs trying to lure customers in. They were not lounging around between jobs. They were actively out trying to make the invoice printer spin. Their manager is a real leader that understands what it takes to run a successful business.

It is certainly harder in a larger organization to instill this same attention to the customer and invoice spinning exercises, yet that does not mean it cannot be done and should not be attempted. It is important to instill a sense of "why we are here" in every organization. It bothers me when people become so insular or specialized that they think they are not involved in the basics of "why we are here" (which is, for those of you who have missed my constant drumbeat, to spin the invoice printer). And, as the old saying goes, it only takes one rotten apple, in this case, to make a rotten business.

So, if you see an excess of the activities outlined below, I suggest you have or are creating a rotten business, one from which it may be impossible to recover.

1. Employees have a disdain for the customer. They think the customer is stupid, uncouth, and does things they do not want to do. They have no desire to visit customers' facilities.
2. Even worse than this, employees are not aware of the customer and could not name one if their life depended on it. Everyone should know who the top five customers are in any facility.
3. There are many internal meetings about many internal things. Meetings without a clear link to the customer are just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.
4. Senior executives and board members are more worried about "appearances" and perquisites than they are about serving the customer.
5. An excessive culture among senior executives and board members focused on preserving the status quo.

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6. Excessive focus on internal cross department budgets. These are just rearranging funds the organization already has; they have no purpose as relates to sustaining the business.
7. Employees more worried about "feelings" than performance.
8. Different rules for different levels in the organization. The CEO of Wal-Mart shares a hotel room with the CFO when they travel together. They do this because they ask all traveling employees to share rooms and they do not want to create a class distinction in the organization-everyone is an employee.
9. Employees worrying about getting "their fair share" of holidays and vacations rather than worrying about how the customer is going to be served in their absence.
10. Meetings with customers cancelled or postponed in favor of having internal meetings.
11. Favoritism or protected employees of any kind. You know, the employee who gets by with anything because they are protected by a boss higher up.
12. Multiple reporting periods of losses. Those of you familiar with Statistical Quality Control know that 3 data points headed in the same direction is a systemic trend. This principle applies to Profit and Loss statements just as it does anywhere else.
13. Blaming the outside environment for poor performance.
14. Looking to the government to fix the organization's problems.
15. Lack of a serious product development and product feedback system which rigorously works with customers and focuses on their present and future needs.

For ethics this week, I would ask if you have ever looked through a co-worker's papers for the express purpose of harming them or their career. This happens more often than you might think. And, of course, don't forget to do everything safely. ##

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