

Building A Committed Workforce



By Kimberly Mitchell

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What does commitment really mean? Isn't building a committed workforce standard practice and something that just automatically happens? Actually it takes very specific behaviors on the part of leadership to build a truly committed workforce. This article reviews the importance of a committed workforce and the necessary actions of a leadership team in order to continue building on that commitment for the highest levels of sales, service and productivity.

What is a committed workforce (and what isn't one)? A committed workforce is one that uniformly and consistently pursues your company's mission and goals with undivided community responsibility and complete personal accountability. Due to each individual's personal commitment, there is perfect trust and absolute faithfulness in the company's purpose. Being committed doesn't mean blind loyalty. It actually means possessing the courage to ask questions and create alternative solutions. Because of the mutuality of the commitment, the leadership encourages unique ideas and invites distinctive thinking. Building a committed workforce begins by promoting a committed leadership team.

What Can Your Leadership Team Do to Sustain Commitment? It is up to your leadership team to drive your committed workforce. There are specific steps that leaders can do to ensure that employees are truly committed to your goals, rather than simply "going along for the ride".

- 1. Look for signs of commitment during the hiring process.** Commitment is not something that is easily taught, it is learned and it becomes an imbedded personality trait. Individuals who are committed can cite examples from their past of how they have overcome adversity to support an organization's goals and they can explain what commitment means to them. Identifying individuals during your initial hiring process who understand commitment will help you to build a workforce that sustains this unique culture.
- 2. Set clear expectations of what commitment looks and sounds like.** As stated earlier, commitment does not mean blind loyalty but nor does it mean raging forward with creative ideas without involving the talents of other team members. Clearly communicate the behaviors of a committed individual. Explain that candid does not mean putting down other individuals and being transparent does not mean compromising necessary confidences between employees. Remaining silent when policies are not working correctly is not what is meant by being committed. The term "commitment" can be interpreted many different ways, so it is important that the clear expectations are established so that everyone understandably supports this culture.
- 3. Gather feedback and consciously consider all options.** It is common to spend weeks or months in executive meetings to determine policy changes and then once the announcement is made to the masses, it is expected that everyone immediately get on board with the changes. It is easier to get on board with changes when you know that many opinions and ideas have been considered. In order to gain company commitment, ask for suggestions, get input and suggest "what if" scenarios to see what thoughts stick with everyone. You may think certain decisions are concrete, but when you pose

questions you may get ideas that you didn't anticipate. Give your organization a chance to contribute their opinions and the levels of increased commitment may surprise you.

- 4. Allow others their opinions and understand how to respect individuality while promoting community.** When an individual voices an opinion that is different from the mainstream, it is common for that employee to receive negative body language or to be convinced of all the reasons why that viewpoint is wrong. We all like to do a good job of persuading others that our way is the right way. When building commitment, it is critical that we learn how to ask effective questions rather than simply promote our perspective. Asking the right questions will help you to uncover new ideas and will also help employees to see that you care about their ideas. By responding to your questions, they will also come to their own conclusions of the appropriate courses of action.
- 5. Reach out to others with sincerity and acknowledge the subtleties.** As leaders, we see behaviors of others that do not represent commitment. It is critical that we acknowledge those behaviors (not as right or wrong) but simply acknowledge the presence of those behaviors and identify why that employee is demonstrating those behaviors. Are they not committed to new policies because they are still adapting to the changes and they need more practice or do they see problems with following through with the new policies that you may not recognize? It is vital that we ask questions and identify why others are demonstrating behaviors that do not support company initiatives. If we do not acknowledge that these behaviors are happening, we are tolerating lack of commitment and this could be perceived to mean that commitment does not matter to us.
- 6. Share the vision.** When employees understand the big picture and they understand why we are making the strategic decisions that we are making, they are much more likely to be committed to those decisions. It is when people have a narrow vision and do not understand the motivations behind management's decisions that employees begin to rationalize their observations. Employees need to hear from leaders not only what is happening, but WHY it is happening. By sharing the purpose, leaders are helping others to grow in their decision-making skills and to learn how to make decisions that continue to sustain a committed culture.
- 7. Coach each other.** It is important that our leadership team feels confident and empowered to coach each other when we see that we are missing opportunities to develop a committed workforce. Develop transparency among your leadership team so that you continue to identify opportunities to grow.

What can you gain from a committed workforce? Commitment means everything to your organization. Without commitment, your organization is missing opportunities to operate at its fullest potential. We need everyone in our organization to be on board and we need them to fully understand why we are doing the things that we do. When we are committed to growing and sustaining a successful business, we need to be committed to understanding the foundations of building a committed workforce.

For more information on the process of leading a behavior-based leadership initiative, please contact Kimberly Mitchell, President of InterWeave, at 813-933-4432 or kmitchell@interweavecorp.com.

