

Attitude is Everything

Management has a lot to do with influencing employee attitude



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The most important element in producing a quality product or service is the attitude of the people doing the work—not only the worker—but the attitude of all levels of management. Employee attitude about the product, about the work, about the boss, and about the company will pretty well determine the quality of the work. By quality, I mean the absence of defects—conformance to the requirement—not the goodness of the product. However, goodness comes from attitude also.

Attitudes are Habits

An attitude is a thought habit; a habitual way of thinking. You might say that, it's thinking without thinking; acting without thinking. Take football fans, for example. Every major city has a professional football team. It's been said that on any given Sunday, any team can defeat any other team. Also, the players are from all over the country, and football is a business. Why then are fans so nutty about their team? Chicago fans sit out in freezing weather to cheer on the Bears. Any sensible person would prefer their living room, a cold beer, and a TV. Football fans have a attitude. Wouldn't it be nice if your employees were that nutty about their job and your company?

Most attitudes are formed as we grow up. Teachers, ministers, scout leader, parents, TV, etc. all influence our attitude. Once an attitude is formed, it's pretty much the way a person will think about any subject. We vote, select a mate, select a car, and raise our children based on that attitude. A person's attitude about their job, the product or service they produce, and about their leader will determine the quality of their work.

If a new employee starts their career with a company in a dirty shop, with rejected material sitting around on a dirty floor, with a supervisor who will ship anything, you can imagine what kind of attitude will develop. A "That's good enough" attitude will produce "That's good enough" work.

On the other hand, if you run a clean, well organized, well equipped, and safe shop or office, that first impression—that first attitude—will be positive, and will become a habit. When a candidate for employment walks into your lobby, or is interviewed, their attitude about you starts to form. As they say, "The product looks like the management." In fact, everything looks like the management; the building, the lawn, the parking lot—everything.

You have an opportunity to start molding a new employee's attitude through a new-employee orientation program. This program should be professionally presented by a knowledgeable person. People are used to professional presentations and will recognize a slip-shod job. The person making the presentation must be properly dressed and well equipped. A slide show can display the rules as well as photos of the products, managers, and work area. The goal is to give the new employee a sense of belonging, like a football fan. You want your employees to be fans of the company.

While much of an orientation program will be devoted to insurance, company rules, safety, and company benefits, most of the program should be devoted to the importance of producing a quality product or

service. Without a quality product there soon will be no company benefits. You should make an impressive sales

presentation with photographs of your product in use, or better yet, the real thing. You should include information about your customers and what your customers do with the product. It's relatively easy to impress a new employee; you should give it your best shot. You might talk about what a defective would cost. For example, a helicopter part may cost enough to send a kid to college, or buy a sports car. That type of comparison makes an impression. New employees should leave the orientation program with a pamphlet in their hand and stars in their eyes. They should be excited about starting work.

There are many ways to develop a positive attitude. Don't forget the attitude of your present workforce; your "old" employees. They may have a good attitude, but then again, maybe not. They know all about you and your attitude; they know what you will put up with. If you haven't made your performance standard clear, they've pretty well figured out what it is. Their attitudes about the company, the product, and you are already formed.

The good news is that attitudes can be changed, even improved, if necessary. When you come up with your first-class employee orientation program, put the old employees through it too. They might be surprised at what they learn about their company.

Since an attitude is a habit, you need something to break the old habit; and establish a new habit. A special event, like kicking off a new quality improvement program, or announcing a new product, or a new boss, or a new customer can do it. If done well, it could be a fresh start for everyone. People must feel good about their work and their company.

Show Time

Attitudes are affected by repetitive messages; advertising, examples, training, and communications. Some quality control gurus say advertising doesn't work. That's nuts, advertising is one of the most effective attitude adjustment tools known to man. If it wasn't, why would it occupy so much expensive TV time? Why would magazines be jam-packed full of ads? The idea of all advertising is to get into a person's head. In advertising terms, the idea is to position your company and the product correctly in the employee's mind.

I once had a boss who thought Mercedes Benz was the quality standard of the auto industry. That was his attitude. Yet, he never owned one and never even drove one. Who convinced him it was the best? Could it have been Mercedes Benz?

You should think about ways to keep the quality message in front of the employees all the time: posters, special events, award presentation for outstanding employees, and such.

Housekeeping should be a big issue. Are the yellow lines getting a little pale? Are overhead lights collecting dust? Are desks, file cabinets, and machines topped with paperwork that should be put away or tossed out? Are the rest rooms and break rooms clean? Is it a nice place to work?

If you are the big boss, you should examine the attitude of not only the workers, but the leaders—managers and supervisors. It's their attitude that has the biggest effect on the employee's attitude, and thus on product quality. The attitude of these people is formed by your attitude, and they pass along their version of your attitude and their version of your performance standard. A supervisor who is willing to bend the specification to get something out the door has installed a "that's good enough" attitude in the people he or she leads. Sometimes it not the supervisor, but the thought-leader of the group; an employee who is more influential than the supervisor. It's a common thing. It's like the old black-and-white prison movies, when the new prisoner gets the real scoop from some old con leading against a gray wall, flipping a coin. "Hey kid, come over here. I want to talk to you."

Attitudes can be improved that will improve the quality of the work. Of course, it depends on how strong the attitude is. I think it would probably be hard to convince a terrorist that it's a better idea to negotiate



with the enemy than to blow him up. From time to time, you may need to terminate someone with the wrong attitude. On the other hand, it's not difficult to persuade most workers that their work is important and they must be careful not to make a mistake. I have known workers who would quit rather than cheat, or take

shortcuts or to do “good enough” work. Their attitude won't let them do it.

Measuring Attitudes

There are many scientific tests to evaluate a person's attitude. Forget those, you don't need them. If you've been around a few years, you already know how to measure someone's attitude. You do it every day. After failing to get information from the clerk at a local store, you might think, “That guy has a lousy attitude.” You don't need to put a number on it.

Some obvious indicators of a poor attitude are poor attendance, lateness, complaining, high defect rate.

The important thing is that you recognize the importance of attitude and do something about it. Hire people with a good attitude, get rid of people with a bad attitude, take a close look at the attitude of the people who lead people doing work. Keep attitude in mind when making decisions.