



How to Be a Great Employee in Hard Times

Description

One of the most challenging aspects of this crisis is that it keeps dragging on with no clear end in sight. No one really knows where we are in the process. (We can endure most things when we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but this tunnel feels more like a maze.) And the stress of working so hard to keep the lights on and the bills paid is starting to wear on business owners and leaders. Many are getting discouraged and worn down.

But hereâ??s the good news: Our employees are in a position to make a real difference. When they â??getâ?? the pressures leaders are facing, they can start acting with a real sense of urgency, take ownership, and get some of the pressure off of us.

Most of the time, my columns are focused on what leaders can do to be more effective. But for the past several weeks, I have met with many leaders in businesses and communities via webinars and Q&A sessions on Zoom and Webex. Iâ??ve shared and learned about what leaders can do during and after this pandemic. It has made me wonder if employees know how hard owners and leaders work so they can continue to have a job and get a paycheck. So with this column, I am asking the question: *What are the best employees doing right now to help their companies?*

Many employees may not realize the pressures business owners face even in the best of times. It is a great responsibility to own a business. Until I owned one, I had no idea how hard it was. From taking the risk of losing everything, to making sure payroll is met, to investing in equipment, products, etc., the responsibilities are endless.

Now factor in the virus, which has put many businesses at risk for not surviving, and it gets even tougher. Many businessesâ?? revenue is down 50 to 100 percent. In addition to everything else, business owners and leaders are completing lots of applications for grants and loans. Theyâ??re also making changes in operations to assure safety for staff and customers. And in many cases, theyâ??re purposely not sharing their own fears so as to not create anxiety with employees.

Yes, leadership can be a lonely job. Leaders accept that. Yet due to business ownersâ?? and leadersâ?? focus on the survival of their company and community as well as the health and safety of the workforce and family, theyâ??re also living with fear, sadness, anger, frustration. The pressure to

keep a happy face on for employees can be exhausting.

I wonder if employees understand how vital their own behavior is to the health of their owners and leaders, not to mention their coworkers, customers, and the company.

No leader can be strong all the time. We are only human. On any team, different people need to step up to be the strength from time to time. This is one of those times. As leaders work around the clock and deal with great pressure from all sides, employees need to step up their game, take ownership of their job, and make themselves as valuable as possible.

In 2012 I wrote a book called *The Great Employee Handbook*. At the heart of that book was a simple message: When you focus on being the best employee you can be, not only will you be happier and more productive, but great and often surprising opportunities will open up for you. I believe this 100 percent and have seen the truth of it play out many times over the years. And this message is especially vital these days.

Here's a short list of what I see great employees doing right now:

- 1. Great employees show empathy for the leaders in the workplace.** Realize the owner and your supervisor are doing the best they can. Great employees see the other person's situation and do all they can to make life easier for them.
- 2. Great employees consider the broader context.** They are careful not to drag leaders down with the little things, especially these days. Remember that the boss needs headspace and energy to solve big problems.
- 3. Great employees provide the best customer service possible.** Many customers have found other ways to get products and services. It is not the transaction they are looking for; it is how they are made to feel. Most everyone is a little anxious, depressed, and lonely these days. Make it your mission to be a small bright spot in a customer's life.
- 4. Great employees are positive and enthusiastic.** Showing enthusiasm is always nice, and it is vital right now. We all need to be cheerleaders in the workplace. The best employees create memorable customer experiences and are great coworkers.
- 5. Great employees are coachable.** They welcome feedback and try hard to integrate it into their daily work. They're not overly sensitive, and they don't bring drama to the workplace.
- 6. Great employees don't talk behind people's backs.** They carry their own messages and do their best to work out solutions themselves before getting a supervisor involved.
- 7. Great employees don't say, "That's not my job."** They have an ownership mentality and are willing to do what it takes. They're also happy to do things outside their job description. In fact, they are excited about learning new things and expanding their skill set.
- 8. Great employees stay busy (in a smart way).** If you've completed everything on your to-do list, look for ways to bring in more revenue, to make things better, or offer to coach others. (If nothing else, you can always clean and organize!)

- 9. Great employees show their appreciation.** In my workshops, it is very common for someone to share with me they don't get complimented enough by their boss. I then ask them when the last time was that they complimented their boss. Saying thank you and showing gratitude is a two-way street.
- 10. Great employees pay attention to the changes that need to be made and role model such changes.** Like millions, I have been watching the ESPN series *The Last Dance*, about the 1997-98 Chicago Bulls season and Michael Jordan's life and career. Player after player shared how hard Michael worked. After losing a game in the playoffs in the 1996-97 season, the morning after the loss, Michael was in the Bulls facility working out. When the best workers set the example, others follow. Those who don't will not ever reach their full human potential.

I invite all owners and leaders to share the above list with their employees. Sometimes people don't realize what they are doing (or not doing) until it's brought to their attention. Also, reward and recognize those who get it right so others will begin to understand.

It may help to remember we are all employees in some fashion. I share periodically that at times I was certainly a problem employee. We all have ups and downs. Today we all have the option to become the best person we can be. Let's take it as the opportunity it is and make the most of it. We'll come out better employees, leaders, and human beings on the other side.

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