

# ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP VALUES IN BUSINESS MANGAGEMENT

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When thinking about managing a company, one usually thinks of the business end of operations. This concept is largely propagated by managers responsible for the financial well-being, success, or viability of the organization. In fact, the term 'business' has the connotation of financial management.

Positive financial outcomes are common indicators of successful companies. However, striving hard for a good bottom line has too often inspired dispassionate, results-driven behavior. The concept of customer service outcomes is sometimes disconnected from financial outcomes in the minds of managers.

The disconnection between financial goals and relationship values is not deliberate. In the business world, there can be very distinct differences in the roles and motivations of various managers and employees within a company. Some are motivated by providing quality services or quality products to customers. Others are focused on productivity, economy of operations, and financial results.

A concept that, many times, becomes detached from financial success is that employees (people) are the heart and soul of every business. This is true whether they are providing services, manufacturing goods, selling merchandise, or managing company financial operations. In many ways, employees are customers of the company, too. Instead of buying products or services, staff is "buying-into" the company's values and the company's ways of conducting business.

The main point in this article is that employees (people) of the company and their interpersonal values drive the quality of services and products. People who value courtesy, compassion, and integrity produce better services and products for the company; therefore, financial success is more likely because of customer satisfaction and increased business.

The above narrative isn't meant to imply that companies primarily focusing on the financial end of business don't produce quality services or products. Many companies have systems in place to manage quality, as well as financial outcomes. I suggest, however, that fostering the values of courtesy, compassion, and integrity within a company produces even better business results.

Also, I am not implying that good fiscal management is not important. Sound financial management is essential for a business to sustain its operations, develop better products, and grow.

Achieving a balance between financial outcomes and company-employee values is challenging. Maintaining desirable company values, while trying to run a financially efficient business, involves developing a culture that promotes relationship values, as well as business values.

Companies that relegate employees and customers to the position of financial statistics eventually suffer. When this occurs, most likely courtesy, compassion, and integrity are also being relegated to a low priority or excluded entirely. Companies must integrate their financial goals with value oriented goals in order to thrive and produce quality services or products to their customers.

The remainder of this article talks about what I consider to be three essential values that foster quality business practices. Throughout the article, I refer to these values as either interpersonal values or relationship values. The terms are interchangeable in my thinking. These three values affect the dynamics between people working together and largely determine the nature of company relationships, both internally and externally.

At the end of the article I visit the concept of trust as it relates to the values discussed and talk briefly about the impact of trust upon effective work teams.

## **Courtesy**

I have chosen courtesy as the first tenet in the list of what I consider good business values. Courtesy is a gesture inviting cooperation between people. Cooperation between humans is a very old trait. It was much more necessary for our survival in early tribal living than it is now.

In our current culture, there are few consequences for individuals who exist outside of the bounds of courteous and respectful behavior. That is why we are likely to experience discourteous behaviors in our day-to-day encounters with others. These encounters are not limited to inconsiderate drivers or rude sales clerks; they often occur at work, where many of our interpersonal interactions take place.

Courtesy is a prime indicator of how well people work together in a company. Courtesy fosters cooperation, and cooperation is necessary for a healthy work environment and successful business operations. Courtesy can be observed throughout companies that are considered to be good places for people to work.

Businesses where employees and managers exhibit courtesy between one another also demonstrate courtesy toward their customers. Customers want to see quality in the services and products for which they pay hard earned money. Demonstrating courtesy toward customers shows interest in their needs and desires. Customers are more likely to feel satisfied with a service or product if they are treated with courtesy, dignity, and respect.

Courtesy is symbolic of mutual respect between people. It reflects our relationship skills. When people are treated with courtesy, a feeling of dignity is generated that makes most people want to reciprocate. In the workplace, that means better teamwork, increased productivity, and higher quality products or services.

Courtesy is contagious. Conversely, disrespect is also contagious. Feelings tend to follow our perception of relationships. If the relationship is one of mutual courtesy and respect, we have positive feelings toward the person. If the relationship is perceived as disrespectful, rude, or discourteous, our feelings toward the other person are negative, our desire to be cooperative wanes, and teamwork falters.

Lack of courtesy between workers is a symptom of companies where managers don't recognize the value of their employees. As a result, there is staff dissatisfaction and a high rate of turnover. Of course, dissatisfied staff also produce inferior work and products.

## **Compassion**

Compassion is the second relationship value that I consider essential to good business management. Many of the same reciprocal concepts hold true for compassion as for courtesy. In work environments with a dearth of compassion, employees find themselves working for their own gains. Lack of compassion between managers and employees generates an atmosphere of apathy that extends into the quality of work.

When one works in an environment lacking interpersonal compassion, he or she becomes self-focused, goals are self-serving, and concern for the feelings of others is irrelevant. Stepping on someone else's fingers to reach a higher rung on the company ladder or diminishing another's image to make one's own image appear larger demonstrates personal lack of empathy and compassion. Such behaviors indicate values that are the antithesis of interpersonal compassion.

Certainly, some businesses decisions must be made for the good of the company. These decisions are not necessarily lacking compassion but, rather,

exist for the good of the whole - the good of the many. They are not dispassionate, but they are regretful.

Compassion is a feeling in response to the well-being of another person. It is a complex response that may include a variety of feelings: sadness, regret, happiness, joy, and many others. In its essence, compassion is recognizing the feeling state of another human being, identifying the same feelings in oneself, and responding accordingly (how you would like to be treated). Compassion is often related to personal experiences in similar situations, but it is sometimes a projection of how one *might* feel if in another person's place.

Workers readily recognize self-serving managers and the lack of interest in others that accompanies their behaviors. Employees also recognize compassionate managers, even in situations where bad news is delivered. I have known employees who, in spite of being laid-off, understood and recognized the compassion of the manager who delivered the devastating news.

## **Integrity**

Integrity is a word that is often thought of as a character trait. If I have integrity, I possess values and, thus, I have good qualities. I will expand this definition of integrity to include some behavioral concepts.

Integrity, as I refer to it, is a *reflection* of people behaving in accordance with their ethical beliefs. In other words, integrity is the observable quality of a person's beliefs; their professed values are demonstrated through their behaviors. In the work place, integrity can be observed in managers whose values are clear and manifested in the ways in which they manage operations and employees.

Often, companies publish lofty values in mission statements or in their goals and objectives. Many times, these *display values* are not seen in action by company employees. Employees are quick to recognize when managers and companies lack integrity and don't "practice what they preach." Integrity means not only stating your values, but also demonstrating those values in day-to-day operations.

Companies harboring managers with poor integrity usually do not demonstrate their enounced values through the quality of their products or services. You probably know of at least one business with which you have had a negative experience, in spite of their advertising. Take a look at the many websites promoting "highest quality" standards for their products and customer support; consumer reviews show us that the company sales pitch often doesn't match product or service quality.

Values are often promoted through company human resources departments. Policies and procedures are published to reflect the laws of the land and the standards of the organization. Unfortunately, managers do not always support these values, neither in their thinking nor their behaviors. For example, most companies pronounce support of a harassment free work environment, yet some overlook inappropriate sexual relationships between managers and employees. Others condone the use of quick paths of employee advancement through sexual relationships and favors.

Integrity is a measure of how individual employees and companies, as a whole, behave in relation to their stated business ethics. It is the “walk that follows the talk.”

## **Trust**

I end this article with some final thoughts about trust. Trust is not a relationship value in itself. Trust is a feeling that evolves as a result of interactions and behaviors between people that demonstrate positive relationship values. Trust, in other words, is a byproduct of consistent demonstration of ethical behaviors.

People who are courteous, compassionate, and show integrity in their beliefs, words, and behaviors are usually perceived as trustworthy. They enter into trusting relationships with others and work well in teams. In business, trust is a prerequisite to good teamwork. Work teams do not function well in environments where trust between individuals and groups is low.

Trust is a feeling of safety (emotional and physical) regarding our relationship with another individual or a group of individuals. In work teams, distrust between group members may be caused by many things, mostly negative experiences with other members. The development of trust (or lack of trust) can be easily related to the values discussed in this article.

A significant destroyer of trust is discourteous behavior. We tend not to trust people who are rude to us, especially when they embarrass us in front of peers or make us look bad in front of others. Those who “speak their mind,” without considering the feelings of others, evoke feelings of mistrust. Sometimes, coworkers who pride themselves on saying what is on their mind, view such behavior as a badge of their assertiveness. This misconceived behavior is perceived as discourteous and untrustworthy behavior by those with whom they work. Discourteousness impairs trust development.

Another closely related trust destroyer is lack of compassion. The degree of compassion demonstrated to others affects relationships between peers and the performance of work teams. Trust of another person is largely generated by our

perceived safety in relation to that individual. People lacking in compassion for others don't feel safe to us and, therefore, not trustworthy.

Similarly, a person who is perceived as "self-serving" is usually thought of as untrustworthy. Self-serving people are generally not very compassionate and can easily step on other people while seeking to satisfy their own needs and desires.

People who are interested in furthering their own agenda or building their sense of importance sometimes do so to the detriment of others. The more focused we are on our own work, our own advancement, and our own importance in the company, the less we recognize the feelings and needs of others.

People perceived as lacking integrity also are not considered trustworthy. If a coworker sees that someone's behaviors are not guided by their values, that person is usually not trusted.

Lack of integrity is likely to be perceived as a form of lying. Sometimes it is subtle in nature, other times it is quite obvious. The Native American line in old western movies, "you speak with forked tongue," is a very good description of one who lacks in integrity.

It is interesting that so many managers do not "practice what they preach." Integrity deficits are one of the easiest for employees to recognize. Little does more to damage the reputation of a manager than being seen as lacking integrity.

## **Summary**

This article presented some concepts about interpersonal values as they relate to business management. Companies lacking in courtesy, compassion, and integrity also find themselves lacking in other important areas, such as employee satisfaction and retention, quality of services and products, and customer satisfaction and return business. These factors all influence the financial viability of the business, whether it is small or very large.

Whether you work for a large company or a small business, your values can impact those around you. The values and behaviors of each person, in combination with those of others, construct the culture of the work place.

Courtesy, cooperation, and integrity are contagious. Even destructive work cultures can be infiltrated by these positive values. When you model them in your work habits, others will begin to see the benefits and incorporate them into theirs.

To sum up, courtesy, compassion, and integrity are all personal characteristics that build trust. Trust is essential for effective teams. Effective teams build successful companies.