

6/29/2016

\$15/hour—and All You Can Steal

Bill McCurry



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“Your employees see it one of two ways. Either it’s \$15-an-hour and all you can steal until you’re caught and fired—or it’s \$15-an-hour and jail if you’re a crook.”

The two owners of the security firm McCurry’s used explained not everyone grew up understanding right from wrong. Their logical premise was if we did a thorough job vetting employees, we’d find honest people. Then we had to keep them honest rather than see them succumb to temptation.

It’s not keeping a job as much as fear of public exposure, arrest and potential jail time that motivates employees to be honest. If McCurry’s didn’t have a consistent policy of legal consequence, we were ignoring

the mightiest loss prevention tool we had: the fear of prosecution, exposure and embarrassment. The recommendation was we should make prosecution inevitable. Furthermore, to have an inconsistent policy would open us to charges of discrimination if we prosecuted one person but not another.

We had a companywide kick-off meeting to introduce the security team. The emphasis was controlling external theft. How to ensure delivery drivers, meter readers, customers, etc., were properly welcomed, treated professionally, but not given access to assets they could appropriate. An anonymous “hotline” was announced. Any employee with concerns about theft, harassment, discrimination, etc., could call anonymously. The line was connected directly to the security firm.

Staff was reminded McCurry’s prosecutes theft. Every issue would be investigated with the full support of law enforcement. The message was clear and understood.

Our GM wasn’t a big sleeper. Bob would hit Denny’s about 4:00 a.m. for his six cups of coffee while doing employee reviews, crafting marketing plans and bonding with cops who were changing shifts. Bob knew something was wrong, but he couldn’t pinpoint it, so he asked the cops how to find a thief. Our security cameras weren’t in the employee locker room. The cops convinced Bob to hide a camera in that area and watch it. We didn’t record the camera feeds back then. They said, “When you do catch someone, call and

we'll pick him up." At least six cops wanted to nab the thief.

One day, watching the new camera, Bob saw an employee walk in with merchandise, open his locker and put the merchandise in his backpack. The locker wasn't closed before Bob had called one of his friends. Within seven minutes, there were six fully uniformed cops and a police dog on site. Seems they decided this would be a good time to prove the Sacramento police were on the job. Bob identified the suspect. The police handcuffed him and read him his rights. Employees watched.

The cops were "disoriented" in our facility, so they walked around with the handcuffed suspect for two minutes before they could find a nearby locker room. They opened his locker and took the backpack with the merchandise as evidence. They again got "disoriented" and had to march the perp through every square inch of our store. By then, every employee was calling other employees at all our branches sharing the news. It wasn't intended, but this arrest was the optimum employee theft deterrent.

We wanted an honest work environment. We didn't want employees working where they knew or suspected people around them were stealing or doing drugs. We supported an environment that kept honest employees on the job.

Because these policies worked for McCurry's doesn't mean they'll work for you. Consult local counsel about your rights and obligations. Keep your work place pleasant and your employees safe. It's critical for your long-term success. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.