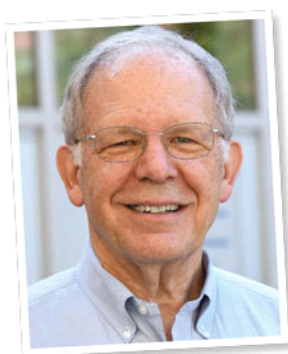


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Positive Praise = Successful Staff

Bill McCurry



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Media serves us negative news. We're constantly bombarded by web phishing and frauds. Focusing on these can easily make us look negatively at the human race. Security and software companies peddle services and technology to watch our assets, protecting us from evil characters, whether they're vendors, customers or, sadly, employees.

Combined with the common attitude that people don't want to work anymore, it's easy for owners, managers or employees to be disheartened. Focusing on gratitude and what's going right can turn this attitude around.

An astute manager or coworker catches their people doing something right and rarely compliments that person. Don't overplay it. Don't overstate it. A simple, "I saw how you handled that irate azalea customer. You patiently listened without interrupting. You showed concern and empathy, then offered a solution. You made her feel important and glad she returned to voice her frustrations. I'm delighted with how you handled that. Well done!" If you're sincere, specific and prompt, it's quick and makes a very positive impact.

At team meetings, how often have you gone around the room asking each person to identify one customer benefit of what you sell? In their own way, each garden center employee helps customers gain beauty, relaxation, fresher air and joy in their personal lives. Do we celebrate the people who deliver those customer benefits?

Employees today differ from employees a generation ago. They're more focused on work/life balance, however, at the same time most want to be doing meaningful work. So what keeps them on the job?

Being part of a team helps people live a better life and it's a very strong motivator for many employees. That said, how often do we remind them of how they benefit our customers? Just as critically, how often do we remind our customers what we really deliver?

Alerting customers to the benefits you bring to the community is an immense help when you advertise job openings. If your community understands your organization is "on the side of the angels," you'll attract both like-minded applicants and more committed customers. It's a double win.

While garden centers across North America employ amazing people who accomplish unbelievable things for their

community, their company and themselves, how many have nominated high-producing employees for the *Green Profit/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award*? When a retailer brags about a great employee, I ask why they don't nominate that person. The answers are often absurdly comical. The most common excuse is, "With that publicity, they'll be hired away."

An informal search through the last 20 years of Young Retailer Finalists shows those who left their prior employer were NOT NOMINATED by their employer, but by a former college professor, co-worker, vendor or even themselves. There's an obvious correlation between being recognized as a valued employee and the length of their tenure.

Another crazy excuse was, "If I recognize them, they'll want more money." It's no shock that every employee wants more money. Ask yourself, "If they came to me with a competitive job offer, would I match it?" If the answer is "Yes!", match it today. Don't let your people believe they're undervalued and must constantly seek new positions in order to force you to pay them what they're worth. That's not a healthy environment for employees or employers.

It's easier to attract winning employees when you already have a winning team. Winners like to work with winners who'll bring a new employee up to winner status. A new employee will generally leave if they sense they don't fit in.

It's easier to run a positive, focused and committed organization. Reinforcing good behaviors will make those reactions part of your corporate culture. Your company will become a workplace that's more fun, more committed to excellence and more cohesive. Try it. You'll like it. **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) 731-8389.