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Why humanizing your business drives profitability



Since the mid-1990s, many executives from multinational companies have recognized a connection between a successful bottom line and treating employees more like valued human beings. Yet, the reality is there is often a disconnect between the vision and the outcomes.

In an increasingly digital and impersonal environment, workers are becoming more disengaged and consequently less focused and productive. Reversing the trend requires a recommitment to building a culture that honors and respects employees as individuals who have a variety of wants and needs. Whether in customer service, human resources, marketing, finance, operations or administration, employees touch all facets of a corporation internally and externally. A company culture truly focused on its people is the foundation for driving sustained success.

Employer-employee disconnects

It's no surprise that technology is contributing to a society of disengaged and less productive employees. People are overwhelmed by the volume of information that bombards them daily, and that amount is increasing exponentially. While there are some positives to quick access to people and information, technology reduces the amount of time people spend talking to each other. As a result, communication skills suffer, producing a negative impact on the ability to negotiate, compromise, build relationships, empathize and see others' points of view.

To compound matters, the focus on an organization's profitability pushes employees away from providing excellent customer service. Employees are asked to do more with less time and resources. Too often the emphasis on increasing the company's bottom line comes at the expense of not on fostering strong business relationships with customers.

As a result of the way employees are treated internally by management, those behaviors and attitudes are replicated in the way they interact with their co-workers and customers as well. The message to leaders is to "walk the walk" and honor employees in the same way they want their customers to be treated.

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Best places to work share common traits

Many U.S. organizations are implementing programs to humanize the business and meet the interpersonal and emotional needs of their employees. Each year Glassdoor publishes a list of the best places to work, determined by employee feedback. Some of the companies on the most recent list include Facebook, Salesforce, LinkedIn and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. These companies share many qualities such as:

- Respecting employees' work-life balance.
- Adding programs to meet employees' interpersonal needs, including childcare, wellness programs, flex time, telecommuting, four-day work weeks and paternity leave.
- Including perks for employees such as free food and coffee, free dry cleaning, game rooms and napping areas.

An important characteristic of each of these companies is the use of onboarding programs that go beyond the practical requirements of the job. They provide employees with people skills training, including education on how to be genuine, relationship-oriented, emotionally capable and trustworthy employees. These skills help employees be more successful interpersonally and bring a more humanistic culture to the organization. The result: a triple win for organizations in the form of motivated employees, loyal customers and more profitable companies.

How to humanize business

Successful organizations motivate and develop their employees by helping them understand that they have a greater purpose than generating corporate profit. They do this by addressing the people side of the business. A leader's job is to ensure the success and well-being of the company's employees because happy, engaged and motivated workers are not only more productive but are more likely to support the corporate vision and mission, which naturally drives the profit engine.

A Harvard Business Review article, originally published in 1994, highlighted the importance of the service-profit chain. Profit and growth are affected by customer satisfaction and advocacy, which is the result of a company's culture, policies, processes and employees. These companies want customers to be more than satisfied—they want customers to be advocates for their products and services. To accomplish this, companies need to establish value for their services. This value is created by motivated employees who are affected positively by the company's support services and policies.

To humanize business, recommit to training employees to develop strong people skills, including understanding the interpersonal needs expressed by customers through their behaviors. These skills include:

- Communicating effectively
- Showing empathy
- Storytelling and connecting to emotions
- Being authentic
- Building trust
- Creating and nurturing relationships
- Valuing diversity
- Being a servant leader

The bottom line: skill training that is consistent with a corporate culture that honors and respects individuals produces a more humanistic business that results in a more motivated and engaged workforce.

The importance of corporate culture

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In today’s global economy, the competition for talent is fierce. It’s no longer enough for companies to attract the best employees. They have to provide them with more fulfilling emotional experiences than they would find elsewhere. That means creating a corporate culture that values all stakeholders, fosters dedication and encourages transparency, integrity, collaboration and engagement opportunities. In this way, employees can grow both their technical and personal skills. In turn, they fulfill their own emotional and intellectual needs.

Organizations that seek to humanize their businesses by valuing their employees reap the rewards of retention, loyalty, productivity and, of course, increased profitability. This is a winning strategy for any company, large or small.

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