

**Retailer Newsletter**

**December 1, 2023**

**Tom’s Business “TIPS”**

***“To Improve Profits”***

**Subject: How Do You Discipline Employees When You Don’t Have Replacements?**

**Happy Holiday Season,**

**At the conclusion of a recent seminar presentation and during our Q&A session, I was asked this question: “How do you discipline employees when you do not have enough employees now?” I thought for a moment and admitted, “That’s a tough question.” When I was about to terminate a person, or when an employee was ‘thinking about quitting’, and I had an inkling (a clue it was coming), I tried to have a standby ready to take over. That was my plan, but I can’t say it always worked out that way. There were times when I was the temporary fill-in person, and depending on what the empty position was, more than once I had to ask my wife to help as a CSR or bookkeeper. However, many times I had to lean on my current staff to pick up the slack. Often, my staff were willing and able to cover for the missing CSR, because they were glad he/she was gone. That’s correct, most employees at your store know who is not pulling their weight, and those conscientious employees want everyone to do their fair share. I learned early on that in order for any new employee to do their job, they had to learn ‘my way’ of doing things. That meant training was of utmost importance. Whether I operated only one store or five, that was the rule. To learn ‘my way’ like everyone else was doing at my stores, all employees working at my business had to undergo a training program. Some of the toughest challenges I encountered were when I purchased an existing service station/c-store. I generally kept most of the CSRs to start. I would typically hear ‘the way we used to do things was . . .’ My answer was always the same, “the rest of my stores do everything the same way”. Our POS system was similar, the price structure for car wash, fountain drinks, and refills were the same. You are not going to change the habits of any new employee without laying out a written training plan. I will be honest with you, there were many times when I struggled with constant turnover. It seems like nothing I did to solve the rotating CSR problem was working. It often crossed my mind to stop spending time and $$ training a new employee when they were just going to quit soon anyway. It almost felt like I was training employees to work someplace else. I will also admit to you that I never gave in to those thoughts of ‘taking the shortcut’. I continued with my policy of giving each new employee a complete training program.**

**I have given you some sound and proven reasons to train your new employees on your ‘store operations and procedures’. Now I would like to add ‘Customer Service’ as another reason for training employees. I will admit that through all my years as a manager and a business owner, often I found myself ‘parenting’ young employees. It seemed I had to suggest to them how to dress properly, speak to customers, and work with other employees. Many new employees are not accustomed to saying, “Thank You” or “Please”. It would be nice if everyone who works in your store came with ‘People Skills’, but unfortunately most do not. If you do not incorporate ‘People Skills’ in your training program, where will your new employees learn this important part of dealing with customers? I can tell you from personal experience that many employees who work in retail do not come to work with a knowledge of ‘People Skills’, and their employers never took the time to teach them. We recently went out to dinner and while I was paying the check at the cashier counter, the young lady who processed my credit card never said anything like, “Was your dinner OK?” or “Thanks for coming in tonight”. She simply set my receipt and card on the counter, and it was up to me to find a pen to use. I signed the receipt and said, “Thank you”. She never spoke a single word to me. In my opinion, that business will always suffer because of CRS interactions like that.**

**Now let’s get back to my opening remarks, “How do you discipline employees when you are short of employees now?” The answer was simple (at least it was to me):**

* **You, as an employer and business owner, have values.**
* **Do not take shortcuts – they will come back to bite you!**
* **You have to look yourself in the mirror each morning. When you do, ask yourself, “Am I doing the right thing?”**
* **As an employer or manager, your objective is to get things done through the efforts of others. You cannot do everything yourself.**
* **Your staff represent you; they are the face of YOUR business.**

**As I visit restaurants and other retail businesses, I often look for hand sanitizer dispensers. Covid-19 did bring us some good ideas, and I believe the availability of hand sanitizers is one of them. I will admit I see more dispensers than prior to the pandemic; however, many *are empty*.  So sad! If you offer any type of food service (yes, coffee and fountain drinks qualify), I think it’s important for you to provide this. This type of offering shows your customers that you really do care about their safety.**

**Are you giving proper recognition to your staff? Do you have a system in place to measure your CSRs compared to each other? I think it’s good for morale if you provide recognition to your staff, especially when the customers can see it. Here are a few ideas you can use to gauge your employees’ performance.**

* **Compliment letters received**
* **Mystery shopper scores**
* **Reporting for work on time in uniform, with a name tag**
* **Use your imagination**

**Maybe the winner, each month, receives a $25 gift certificate to a local restaurant or movie theater. I suggest you have a picture frame displayed prominently so your customers can see the smiling face of your CSR under the caption – *‘CSR of the Month’*. Too many times we all forget to thank our hard-working CSRs. We take them for granted.**

**Here's a thought: I often hear retailers tell me they were too busy to read my email when it arrived. Why not consider setting up a folder on your computer and calling it “Tom’s Tips” (that’s a good title), then copy and paste my newsletter when you receive it? When you have time, open the folder, and catch up with c-store ideas.**

**I just posted a new Safety and security tip on our website as we approach winter. All 50 states deal with some type of weather that is not typical for your part of the country during winter. Being prepared is the best scenario.**

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**If you would like to improve your store sales and profits, give me a call or email. If you are a supplier or organization with retailers, and they are struggling to maintain profitable stores, please reach out to me. We can help these stores operate more efficiently, with less time putting out fires and more time improving profitability!**

***“No matter how bad things go, you’re still way ahead of everyone who isn’t even trying.”***

**Don't be a victim of the 5 Dangerous Words –**

***‘Maybe I’ll Do It Tomorrow’***

**Do it today because tomorrow (~~could be~~) will be too late!**

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***“Our business is making your business better!”***