

Goals-made-fun can improve sales and employee performance standards

BY PATTI YEISER POTTER

Most people are unaware that I earned money for college working summers in a meat packing plant in Detroit. I worked at the end of an assembly line, packing lunch meat, closing the box and putting it on a palette. Our line was diverse: There were ladies from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Greece — two couldn't speak English. There were blacks, whites, Hispanics and one Indian. I was the only college girl. We were all close friends.

I didn't know it then, but that job was precisely where I learned the importance of setting goals to meet performance standards. Oddly enough, our supervisor didn't set our goals per-

se, and truthfully, we didn't set goals for any particular business purpose. We set goals to have fun. How many packages could be boxed per minute? We cranked up the line, testing our agility and speed. How many boxes could be packed per hour? How many palettes could be moved per day? How fast could a box be folded and taped? How fast could bologna be sliced and packaged? We sang while we worked and laughed often, and the days flew by. If we ran into problems the sleuth came out in all of us. Was it the tape? The printer? The slicer? The belt? Quickly! Fix it! We took pride in being the best. After graduating, I found these feelings about goal setting were universal, and, regardless of the job, applying that same sense of

fun could make any task special.

Today, as a business consultant and trainer, I remain an enthusiastic advocate for setting goals and making achieving them fun. This includes both production goals, such as sales numbers, and performance goals that support sales goals. Many people fail to consider that setting goals can be so much bigger than just cranking up sales 10%-15% over last year or focusing strictly on numbers. Goal setting can help you develop your culture and empower employees. Goals, all by themselves, are motivating and add purpose to the day. Goals let you recognize star performers and pinpoint who needs help. Achieving goals can make a business unit a team, complete with

coach and players. Goals let you share your dreams for the future and spark hope in the performers. In fact, any performance issue that gets in the way of effectively meeting important business results can become a performance goal. Often, it is these minor changes in performance that produce major shifts in the bottom line.

How do you determine what criteria to use for setting goals? Look at the performance categories below and consider which, if no longer an issue, would allow you to increase sales:

1. Customer service. Do employees smile? Use the customer's name? Respond proactively and solve problems? Can everyone skillfully handle an upset customer? Use professional telephone skills? Do they dress professionally and appropriately for your business and make a good first impression?

2. Marketing. Do employees really know their products? Do they understand the current ads and promotions? Do they know your pricing compared to the competitor's? Are your brochures and other marketing materials clean, current and neatly displayed?

3. Training. Is everyone able to communicate the benefits of your products? Are people making frequent errors? Is paperwork completed correctly? Do you have one or more employees who are unable to perform a critical task of their jobs correctly?

4. Operations. Can everyone use the equipment? Do they know how to do basic functions such as opening and closing a store, counting money or filling out forms?

5. Personnel. Are the employees working as a team? Are there problems with morale? Are people getting breaks and lunch? Is there any undue stress? Too much absenteeism or tardiness? Do they care about providing excellent service to your customers?

Once you've identified where to focus your energy next year, determine how to make achieving the goals fun. Ask your employees to help! The beauty of my early experience was that work became more like play. The "goals" made us a team, and our success refueled our effort and friendships. No question, our manager was thrilled with our results.

Sometimes in my work I deal with managers who have never experienced the magic of goals-made-fun. In these companies, goals have become a threatening, omnipresent factor that rule the day and the employee's security. They seem devoid of true problem-solving skills or the ability to use goals as a method to help employees self-actualize. They are more apt to fire than inspire, and the cycle gets repeated, employee after "bad" employee, year after year. What if these managers became leaders who encouraged employees? This would benefit everyone involved. I have the fondest memories of my days on the production line, and clearly learning the important skill of goal-setting changed my life and attitude about work. This has served as my single most important experience. As you plan for 2008 and consider goal-setting, think about how to make goals fun, and

watch next year become one of your very best.



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