Hospitality Resources
INTERNATIONAL

Overcoming Obstacles

When I became general manager of my first hotel, I spent my initial weeks talking with the employees of various departments. In meeting with the housekeeping staff, I found a sullen group, who refused to make eye contact, barely responded to my comments, and asked no questions when given the chance.

I made a point over the next few weeks to visit housekeepers individually as they worked about the hotel. After several small-talk conversations with one particular housekeeper, I asked her how she liked her job. She proceeded to show me that her vacuum cleaner barely worked. This poor woman and every other housekeeper spent eight hours a day trying to clean carpets with vacuums that would not pick up trash and dirt. I couldn't imagine anything more defeating!

Within a week, we had new vacuums for the entire department. The cost was several thousand dollars – small change considering the impact it had on the cleanliness of the hotel and the morale of the housekeeping department. I also publicly praised the employee who made me aware of the problem. She became an overnight hero to her co-workers, and everyone understood by this positive reinforcement that management was serious about discovering problems and making improvements.

This story illustrates a key point – that you must make it clear to all employees that you want to overcome obstacles that impede organizational effectiveness.

Make it clear to your employees that you want to know what obstacles they face in the completion of their daily duties. Call a meeting of your team and ask them pointblank, "Is there anything I can do to make your jobs easier? Is there a better way to do this? What obstacles prevent you from doing your jobs efficiently? How can I help?"

Even if you don't get an initial response, establish and keep the lines of communication open. Keep probing with questions about their work, the challenges they face, and the obstacles that impede their efforts.

Sooner or later, they will open up. Hopefully, it will be a problem that will be totally within your power to solve. If it isn't, make every effort to convince your superiors of the necessity of change. Analyze the problem, explore alternative solutions, examine the cost/benefits of each alternative, do all your homework, and present your recommendation to your boss.

If your recommendation is accepted let your employees know and inform them of the timeline for implementation. If not accepted, find out why, explain it to your employees if appropriate, and be supportive of the decision. Continue to look for ways to eliminate obstacles. Revisit the decision periodically in an attempt to convince your boss of the necessity and value of the change.

Putting a positive emphasis on problem discovery and cheerfully following through to correct problems will demonstrate to all your employees your commitment to helping them and improving your operation.

Ed Rehkopf, Excerpted from Leadership on the Line: A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners and Emerging Leaders, Clarity Publications, 2006