

“Open Door” versus an “Open Mind” Policy

An “Open Door” policy means you are accessible to your employees who have questions and problems. Such a policy will not work, no matter what it is called, if your employees do not perceive a genuine commitment to listening and problem-solving. The difference between an “Open Door” and an “Open Mind” policy is the attitude and commitment of the leader.

An “Open Mind” policy helps to uncover problems in your operation, defuses potential blow-ups, builds trust, and improves communication. To be successful with an “Open Mind” policy, you must:

- Be available, accessible, and approachable.
- Listen. Let employees speak. Be patient and constructive in listening to concerns and offering help.
- Be fair and consistent.
- Be prepared to get involved and follow through to solve problems.
- Ensure closure on issues.

If you are concerned about being overwhelmed by employees coming forward, set some guidelines such as “by appointment only” or “as time permits.” If some employees are abusing an open door, be forthright and tell them to take greater responsibility in solving their own problems.

Two points of caution:

- While making yourself accessible to employees with problems, keep the interests of the company foremost in mind. This means not becoming an enabler for a problem employee or spending too much time assisting one employee to the detriment of the organization.
- Don’t get emotionally involved in the affairs of your employees, and don’t offer advice regarding their personal lives. Instead, refer them to professionals who are trained to help individuals with personal, emotional, and mental health issues.