

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

NEVER ASSESS ATTITUDE

Jerry forever badgered customers. He didn't know when to quit upselling. What customers wanted was never good enough for him. The goading got out of hand, and folks started walking out empty-handed. Complaints mounted about his relentlessness, and his manager got sick of his belligerent attitude.

Delores loved to help out. She received constant praise for her work ethic and was always the first to volunteer for menial chores, such like taking out the trash, moving cartons to the dumpster or counting the drawer at the end of the day.

Beatrice was the model of efficiency. Her typing could be heard from across the room, and she never seemed to take her eyes off the computer screen. *Tap, tap, tap* — everyone marveled at her cheerful attitude when she attacked the company's books.

What's interesting is the story behind each of these music store employees.

Jerry was the consummate professional. He believed everyone ought to have the highest-quality equipment he or she could afford. Ironically, he cared too much. Delores was recognized for her honesty — that is, until the



Judge staff on behavior, not on how you think they feel

manager found out her friends picked up much of the store's merchandise, which she'd hid in the dumpster. And Beatrice was revered for her attitude until, three months after she resigned, a routine scan of her computer revealed months of online gaming — and during work hours.

BEHAVIOR DOESN'T LIE

The common thread in each of these scenarios? The employ-

ees' attitudes had been misjudged. You can never tell what's in an employee's (or customer's) heart or head. You can judge behavior but not what people think or feel.

It's incredible how often this happens, even among seasoned managers. How many times have you heard the proclamation, "He's got a bad attitude"? This is a huge misstep, and if your formal employee evaluations are laced with this language, you can put your company in serious legal trouble, too.

We can never really know what motivates people. We think we know and often have a hunch, but you're much safer living in the realm of documentable actions.

For example, if a person's perpetually late, it could be because he doesn't understand the significance of timeliness and its impact on fellow employees. Maybe he's dealing with a child care conflict or car problems. None is necessarily excusable, but you should be able to address these issues and correct them with minimal dialogue. It's a huge mistake to accuse someone of having a bad attitude. Such confrontations invite defensiveness and rarely solve the problem.

You could never prove an emotion in court. Anger, disrespect

and laziness are immeasurable. Yelling, name-calling, not picking up after one's self are undeniable actions. Tardiness is a result, not an emotional state of mind. You need to work in this realm when calling someone on the carpet for problem behaviors.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Attacking Jerry's integrity and accusing him of not caring would be a huge mistake. Discussing listening strategies and explaining that customers need to make their own purchasing decisions, based on their own tastes, would be much more effective in correcting the problem. Again, this is about what one does, not what one thinks.

Delores and Beatrice are examples of character misperception. Like a charming street pick-pocket, they seem harmless and deceive others with pleasantries and good manners. Warm fuzzies about people can be just as fatal as writing off a gruff soul for mean-spiritedness.

You may be able to assess deeds, but you can never accurately measure character. **MI**

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