business
for sale

Employees - The Cornerstone of any Business

Employees drive the goodwill of the business and in the case of a change in ownership represent continuity. One of the most important deciding factors for a buyer would always be: Does the staff know about the sale? Will the manager stay on in the business? How long have your staff been working for you? Taking over a business, the continuity of the staff is the most important factor, especially if the buyer is new to the industry they will be very dependent on your current staff compliment.

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The employees in a company form the cornerstone of almost any industry. We have all heard the old CEO's cliché – "our employees are our most important asset"

While this has certainly become a cliché, it nonetheless remains true. Your employees are the face of your business, and in the eyes of your clients and the general public, they are perceived to be the business. How often have you thought that you won't go back to ABC company because they are rude, or "wow I got great service at XYZ enterprises". In both cases, the company gets the credit or blame, not the staff member or people involved.

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A few basic guidelines for you, as an owner, and your employees:

- **Employment contract:**

  You should always give your staff a contract. It provides certainty and clarity to both parties. This certainty and clarity will include matters such as working hours, leave days per annum, etc

- **Job description:**

  In most cases, a detailed job description should also be drawn up and agreed upon. A good job description will assign tasks and goals. It should also be achievable and measurable.

- **Performance:**

  The employee can then be measured against that job description. Immediate intervention, or even a reprimand, can take place in the event the staff member is off track. Equally, it is easy to thank and praise staff who are in fact meeting expectations. This helps raise job satisfaction.

- **Don't get too personal:**

  An employee sells their skills, ability, and time in exchange for money. They are not your friends, and it should be remembered they applied for, and were hired, to perform a task. This does not mean however that you should treat your employees without understanding. Naturally caring and assistance in a non-work context is often a big part of your role as a business owner.

- **Training /skills:**

  I recently saw a very sad but true cartoon: What if we train our employees and they leave? What if we don't, and they stay? If you don't provide training or skills enhancement to your staff, the best ones may leave. The weaker ones may stay!! Therefore, training should be regarded as an investment, not a cost.

- **Personal issues:**

  As an employer, you will frequently need to pay attention to the personal issues your staff may have. Typical examples may include staff having challenges with family or children requiring time and attention, family trauma such a divorce or death, or even long term illness. Travel time and the cost thereof are also possible challenges given ever-increasing congestion on our roads and the possibility of long distances to and from work

- **When selling:**

  Remember this will take place subject to Section 197 of the Labour Relations Act. This provides, inter alia,that no staff member may be dismissed when the ownership of a business changes hands. Another important thing to remember is that accurate records and calculations will need to be made regarding any leave pay or bonuses that are due or payable in the hands of the new owner. This calculation is then brought into account when calculating pay for the business.

A good tip:

It is frequently a good idea to ensure that your staff has signed a restraint of trade. This prohibits them from competing with you on leaving the company. It can also cover things like approaching the same client base, using proprietary know-how of the company, etc.