

# Employee relations: Being a better boss

## These ideas might help your employees want to go to work, rather than making them feel they have to.

by Bill Pensyl

■ Because it's service-oriented, the green industry's most important asset is its employees. Well-trained and dedicated employees are its backbone.

Start out by letting all employees know exactly what's expected of them and what they can expect from you. Set up rules and make sure *everyone* follows them.

But always remember to treat them as human beings. They are not machines. They have needs and desires that must be respected. They have families, and occasionally may need time off from work to attend to family matters.

Good performance should always be recognized and, on occasion, be rewarded in some way. However, don't make praise too cheap. People need to know that the boss sees their good work and appreciates it.

The boss also needs to let employees know when they've "messed up." Don't make this an embarrassing moment for them. Take them aside, away from the other employees, to speak to them about what went wrong. Ask them if they recognize what happened and how they can avoid making the same mistake again.

Rewards for good performance don't have to be a big expense. Often, simple recognition at a group meeting is enough. One idea for a simple award could be an "Attaboy" (or "Attagirl") Award presented to employees that come up with time- or money-saving ideas.

If you want, you might even include a small cash award along with a certificate as an extra incentive. Ideas for awards could be: "Best Site Crew of the Year,"

"Most Improved Employee of the Year" or "Rookie of the Year."

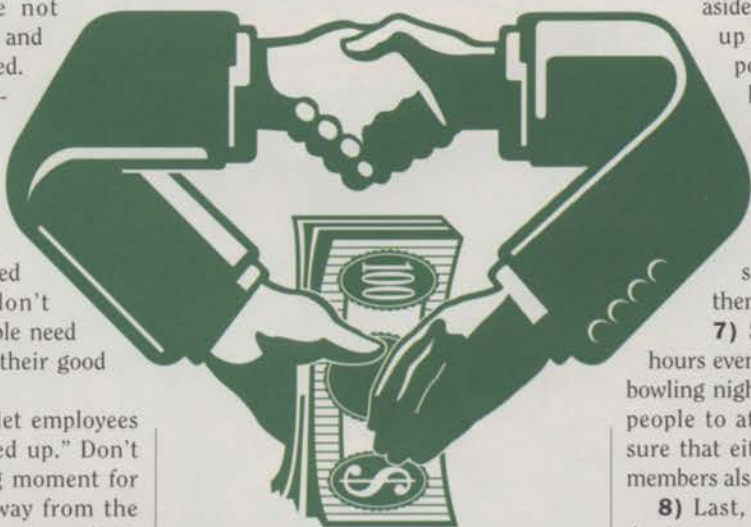
**Individual dealings**—When dealing with individual employees on a daily basis, keep some of the following ideas in mind:

1) Treat everyone as an individual with individual needs.

2) The "shop steward" idea for a small company does not work. Allow all employees to talk directly to the boss. Plan any sensitive meetings you may need to have during off-hours or away from the office. Any employee can be made to feel very low if asked to please leave the office so the "big bosses" can talk.

3) Listen to what all your employees have to say.

4) Ask them for their opinions and input on such things as daily work assignments.



5) Put up a suggestion box for the shy ones who find it difficult to talk to the boss face to face. You'd be surprised how many good ideas there are out there, but not talked about because of a person's fear of ridicule.

6) Share good news with your employees, such as the birth of a child or the discovery of a good fishing hole. Doing this may lead to your people opening up a little. They will become less afraid of talking about what might be on their minds.

7) Be personable, not personal.

8) When you're wrong, admit it!

**Group dealings**—When dealing with your employees as a group, some of the following suggestions might be helpful:

1) Set up regular meetings to discuss plans and set up daily work schedules. Keep them "on track."

2) Get them involved in some of the decision-making process, such as when purchasing a new piece of equipment. Because they're the ones that must use this equipment every day, they'll know what they need to make the job easier and faster.

3) Let them know how the company is doing. Tell them as much as you can. They need not know everything—just those things that concern them on their job. Talk about new contracts that might be coming up. Tell them where you see the company being in 5 to 10 years, and what role they might play in it.

4) Provide plenty of training, either on a group or individual basis. Get your more seasoned people involved in training newer ones.

5) Go out and work with the crews whenever your schedule allows.

6) If you have a building or room set aside for your employees' use, put up a bulletin board for safety posters, assignment sheets, a listing of "house rules," and other notices.

Make sure you—or someone on your staff—inspects its condition on a regular basis. Don't just stick things on it and forget them.

7) Set up some kind of after-hours events such as softball games or a bowling night. Try to get as many of your people to attend as possible, and make sure that either you or one of your staff members also attends.

8) Last, but not least, when things don't go exactly the way you expected them to, *keep your cool!* People need stability, even in the workplace.

You'll find that good employee relations are as important as good customer relations and should receive as much attention, if not more, in their development and maintenance. Good employee relations will, in the end, improve your customer relations because your employees will develop pride in *their* company and will want to see it flourish.

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