5 Ways to Improve Franchisor-Franchisee Communications

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Whenever you seek relationship advice – be it spousal or platonic – what is one consistent suggestion or recommendation?

Communication.

But because communication has become such a broad category of discussion, many people have become dismissive of its baseline meaning. Communication is accomplished in a variety of forms. It can be verbal or non-verbal. A lack of good communication is still a leading cause for failing to meet business objectives. Its importance in the business world can't be overstated, especially when it comes to the special nature of the franchisor-franchisee relationship.

To provide you with useful strategies for open and honest dialogue with your owners, here are five ways to improve franchisor-franchisee communications.

1. Zoom in for a closer look

In practice, nothing is more effective than face-to-face communications. It instantly conveys the meaning and emotion of the exchange. Have you ever misinterpreted an email or text message because you missed the tone or context of the content? We all have. We've developed technologies that make communications more streamlined, real-time and instant. In doing so, we've lost the original art behind the practice of being present.

The hub-and-spoke arrangement of a franchisor and its family of franchisees only exacerbates the problem. But with the dramatic rise in videoconferencing tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and a myriad of other similar platforms, we can now reestablish face-to-face communications with very little difficulty. Whether it's a group meeting or a private discussion, put a little more facetime at the top of your priority list.

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2. Want collaboration? Instill a committee approach

Franchisees are the lifeblood of any franchise brand. The proven business model for franchisees to follow is the single best value proposition in your system, but some owners are so focused on their own operations that they miss opportunities to work together and achieve common goals. There are, however, other ideas you can initiate that are designed to foster a collaborative environment.

One such example is the committee approach, put in practice in many internal office settings. Many fans of the hit TV show *The Office* won't soon forget the episode in which two rival Christmas Party committees vied for holiday celebration superiority. But what we're talking about is much more essential. Some franchisors have set up committees of franchisees to oversee aspects of the business operations for the benefit of the system itself. With committees assigned to onboarding new owners, vendor/supplier reviews and marketing/promotions, franchisees who serve on these committees can freely share ideas and insights that help the brand move forward. Making committee assignments a badge of honor also means the franchisees who gain valuable experience and relevance in this setting will help them (and others) become better owners.

3. Aim for a nurturing environment

Franchisors love to describe their systems of franchisees as a family. But if that's the case, far too many franchisees are still getting the in-laws treatment. Strong leadership from the brand starts with open and honest communication with its franchisees. The goal is to create a nurturing environment – and that begins with a vulnerable approach to leadership. Franchisors need to demonstrate that they're just as capable of making bad decisions or mistakes when it comes to operating a franchised business. Getting down to a franchisee level and making a direct effort to connect with them, hear their concerns and alleviate their problems, will earn you respect. In turn, reinforce the fact that you're establishing a nurturing environment. Through your words and actions, let your franchisees know that, when trouble does arise, you want them to feel comfortable reaching out to you first.

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4. Allow for anonymity

Troubleshooting is a continual exercise in improving franchise operations. While these operations and procedures are designed to run smoothly, it's often a different story down in the trenches. Take the restaurant and hospitality industry. In the days before the pandemic, owners didn't think much about recruiting, hiring and retaining staffers. But thanks to the Great Resignation, employee retention has suddenly become a top priority. Franchisors should have regularly scheduled meetings or sessions to discuss issues, problems and difficulties experienced by their franchisees. But if you want honest opinions of the challenges facing your franchisees, here's a further tip: Allow anonymity. If specific issues can be discussed openly and honestly, without fear of retaliation or retribution, you're much more likely to get an accurate

account of what’s really going on – and how to fix it.

5. Retreat to go forward

Many franchisors have latched on to an effective tool for creating an environment for honest and open communication with their franchisees. They participate in annual retreats or getaways for the purpose of team building and improving collaboration and communication.

Where budgets for such events are concerned, an annual retreat doesn’t have to mean an all-expenses-paid weeklong trip to Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas. Franchisors can create an offsite conference experience to fit almost any budget level. But if you do decide to implement this strategy, make sure it’s a setting that’s affordable to attend and appeals to your franchisees. You’ll discover a lot about your owners in a non-office setting and retreats are one of the most popular ways to encourage honest, direct and open communication on both ends of the franchising spectrum.

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