

How Putting People Before Profit Fueled My Company's Long-Term Success

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Never have I been more grateful to be a business owner than when I recently caught up with a close friend and former colleague from my corporate days. This man is the definition of dependable. He's hardworking, always prioritizing work and rarely complains or asks for anything.

Recently, he suffered a major hardship and needed to step back temporarily to focus on his family. Initially, his company was sympathetic and accommodating. In the end, however, he lost the job he had dedicated so much of his time and energy to.

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Corporations are not people...

As his friend, I am heartbroken. As a business owner, I am appalled. While I understand that businesses answer to their shareholders, what I struggle to reconcile is the decision to overlook loyalty and dedication of service for a minuscule amount of money. Learning how little regard the company had for my friend's hardship only reaffirmed the promise I made when I started my company and vowed never to put profit before people.

Not long after my friend told me his story, one of my team members experienced a traumatic event. Instead of taking the

“corporate” approach, citing policy, discussing FMLA and generally making a terrible situation more stressful, my business partner and I leaned in to support them. We made it clear that their well-being comes first. Never did it occur to either of us to let them go during a difficult time in their life because they couldn’t show up and make money for the company. My only thought was to help in any way I could.

...They’re only powered by people

The corporate world is famously unkind, but to find out that your years of service count for nothing at a time of personal hardship is nothing short of cruel. I am sure that had my friend been granted the flexibility he needed, he would have made it up to the company tenfold once he was able to return to work, but that can never happen because his company did not see it that way.

When team members know they will have support at work, especially during their most challenging moments, they are not just motivated; they are inspired. They will freely give you more of their time and attention, and they will care more about their work. Loyalty to your people breeds loyalty in return.

“Culture” and “assets”

What the corporate world has so tragically dismissed is the role of human kindness in cultivating human capital. Many large companies make a big deal about their team members being their most valuable asset, but what they really mean is that they value their team members for the revenue they generate.

As soon as that is no longer the case, they cut ties and find someone else to fill the spot. That kind of culture breeds resentment and fosters corruption because, when companies fail to protect their “most valuable asset,” those assets are less

keen to protect the company.

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True human capital is measured in respect, not dollars

My people are my company. Without them, I would fail as an entrepreneur. I've worked hard to find the right people, train them, nurture their skills and create an environment that fosters creativity, because when they are happy, it shines through in their work. While this leadership style may not always be the most profitable in the short term, it has been a key factor in my company's long-term success.

So, when something unexpected happens, I will be there to offer my support. My people know that, and I have every confidence that they would step up for me if ever I needed them to.

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