Who Is More Important — Your Customers or Your Employees?

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Customers versus employees. It is an age-old paradox that challenges business owners to prioritize the key players who drive their success. It's a bit of an unfair question, as both are imperative to the success and longevity of an organization. But interestingly, when posed with the question, business owners will almost always reflexively respond, though not always with the same take.

Those business owners who possess a judicious sensibility might state, "My customers and my employees are equally important!" While many others tend to present a more definitive stand, usually on the side of the customer. "They are the ones who pay our salaries. Without them, I have no business."

Indeed, more times than not, the value pendulum points to a greater perceived importance of customers. After all, as one business owner put it, "I can always find new employees."

But business owners must dig a little deeper and realize that employees are indeed the lifeblood of their companies and, as such, deserve top billing in every organization. So, let's be clear; your employees truly are more important than even your best customers.

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Your team is your brand

Employees are foundational to the success and growth of a business. They are often both the first and last point of contact in every transaction and, thus, quite literally the face of an organization. They perform their duties, create a positive customer experience and ultimately generate sustained revenue. What could possibly be more important than that?

Naysayers might argue that not every employee is great at their job and that a bad apple might even turn off a customer. This doesn't negate the high value of employees but rather the importance of hiring well.

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Keep your employees happy

Employee happiness has a tremendous impact on overall productivity and customer satisfaction. When employees are not motivated and thriving, they are far less willing and able to tend to a customer's needs the way in which you expect. The concept is simple – happy and satisfied employees lead to happy and satisfied customers. And satisfied customers are, of course, the key to business success.

For a business to scale, customer success and satisfaction must be everyone's job. In the words of the late great founder of Zappos, Tony Hsieh, "Customer service shouldn't be a department. It should be the entire company." Hsieh's insight underscores the importance of every employee throughout an organization.

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Happy employees are your best brand ambassadors

Most business owners understand the power of five-star customer ratings and positive reviews. But happy employees also wield massive influence over a business's bottom line. Statistics suggest happy employees can boost a business's sales by nearly 40%.

Employees who are engaged and feel valued are a business's best brand ambassadors and should be valued as such. They amplify the positive experience required to maintain customer satisfaction and keep them returning for more, ideally with a long line of friends and future customers.

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Fostering employee satisfaction

While it is clear business owners should value their employees above all else, the argument is merely rhetorical unless somehow leveraged for the company's betterment. And that all starts with creating a desirable environment and building the right team.

Business owners who want employees whom they truly value must foster an environment that attracts the type of job candidate they seek. Employee acquisition and retention efforts should focus as much, if not more, on work ethic, personality and professional values than merely the hard skills required for the job. The right employees can be taught new systems or competencies, but even the smartest employee with the wrong attitude will never learn how to be kind or accommodating. And nobody values a bad attitude.

This brings us to the core of every successful business with happy employees and satisfied customers: company culture.

Conscientious hiring and a thriving company culture are the cornerstones of employee satisfaction and customer loyalty.

When business owners create an environment where employees want to work, and customers want to transact, the customer-versus-employee argument is rendered irrelevant.

Because in this scenario, everybody wins.

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