

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1019 Employee “Ownership”... Reality or Fantasy? — Part 1

The term “employee ownership” is one of those corporate buzzwords. We hear it a lot, but deciding what it really means and how to achieve it are often elusive. I’m Jerry Roberts, and I invite you get ready to exercise your ownership muscles, next, on The Extra Point.

Senior leaders started it, and soon everyone in the supervisory ranks began repeating it. “Take ownership” of the organization and what we do here. On the surface, it’s a beautiful idea.

If employees felt like they owned the place, they would take more interest in the progress and success of the enterprise. Productivity would zoom, waste would be eliminated, and profits would be off the scale.

There was only one problem — how do we get people to feel like owners, and not the cogs in the wheel that we treat them like?

At an event much like Live2Lead, about 20 years ago, the speaker before the lunch break discussed empowering workers to step up and take ownership. It was an idea that hadn’t yet been chewed over by everybody.

During the lunch break, a guy named John stopped me and said he liked the ownership concept, but felt it wouldn’t fly at his company because of something he’d done. I asked him to explain.

At a recent staff meeting, a key project was being discussed and there was disagreement on how to proceed. John, who was the CEO, encouraged everyone to give their opinion, then he voiced his.

Unexpectedly, the room began to side with one of the department heads and his position, which caused John to counter with reasons why that idea wouldn’t work.

The tension in the room increased. After several exchanges, with others defending the department head’s position, John snapped, saying, “Look, this is MY company and we’re going to do it MY way.”

John told me the room went immediately silent. The department head said, “You got it, boss. It is YOUR company.” Then, everybody stood up and walked out. John knew he had made a big mistake.

I repeated some of what the speaker had said, and told John he had the answers to fixing the problem. Some of what I told him I’m going to talk about today and tomorrow.

1. If you want people to act like owners, treat them that way. Talk to them the way someone talks to an owner. Trust me, this is not easy for senior leaders to do, and this is where it has to start. The CEO makes owners out of his/her top managers. They, in turn, do the same with the group they lead — and this continues all the way to the front line.

If you talk down to people and make them feel like there is a definite gap between you and them, why would they want to own a chunk of what you represent?

2. Listen carefully to what people say. Look them in the eye, ask them to expand on ideas, making them feel that they’ve brought value to the organization.

3. When you are thinking of making changes that impact a department or group, invite the members of that unit to a coffee break, or even spring for lunch to give them the opportunity to express their thoughts.

(Con’t.)

This is not just a matter of respect. It's not just helping them to feel more like owners, which it will. It's also cheap research that very well might prevent a costly error in judgment.

The closer people are to a problem or situation, the more input they should have in designing potential solutions.

Tomorrow, four more ideas to get people feeling like owners ... including one that will likely make a lot of people nervous ... but it just may be the most powerful strategy of all.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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