



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

From the Golden Zone

People are your most valuable asset, so focus on them

By Susan Rider, Rider & Associates

People are the most valuable part of any organization, so take time to evaluate your long-term strategy for retaining and acquiring the “golden” asset in your company.

Every facility focuses on three primary goals: increased productivity, improved accuracy, and better customer service. What do all three of these initiatives have in common? Success or failure depends on people.

Every year, these initiatives show up on priority lists because every year expectations increase and costs rise. How do you accomplish these goals year after year? First, by taking a step back and looking at the initiatives with fresh eyes; and second, by working with your most powerful tool — your people.

To meet these initiatives, you must have a high quality workforce that embraces your goals and works to meet them month after month. That may be easier said than done, but the following four guidelines will help you develop the workforce you need.

1. Get your team involved. Bring in every manager and supervisor from each functional area. Ask for their input. Tell them where you are and where you need to go as far as achievements. You may want to get some benchmarking

numbers from similar industries to use as an example so they are convinced the goal is achievable. Ask them to share their challenges in terms of people, processes, or equipment.

Let the team brainstorm for solutions. Be careful not to dictate the results. This will shut them down and they will not feel that their input is of value to you. Some of their ideas may be wrong or different but assure your team that there are no bad ideas when brainstorming. Then develop a plan. If your team doesn't come up with an idea that you think has value, lead them to your own ideas by asking them for their thoughts around the topic. If the team feels the plan is theirs, you build ownership and they want to see it be successful. Suggest they conduct the same exercise with their team in each functional area.

2. Groom your next leaders. Unfortunately, companies don't think about this as often as they should. Suddenly, someone instrumental leaves and no one knows how he or she was accomplishing a task or what were the tools, vendors, or methodology to solve problems. Another familiar problem managers complain to me about is not getting promoted, I simply ask “Who would take your place?” They inevitably remark, no one is trained to do what I do. This might have been a good strategy for job security, but it is definitely not a good strategy if you have a desire to move

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up in the company. Many companies complain that their people know the work but they have several areas lacking in leadership style that need to be addressed. This may be when you call in a coach from the outside. It's an investment that can reap many benefits.

3. I care, why don't they care? This is a common complaint among managers, especially with a staff of Millennials entering the workforce. To change their attitudes and instill an attitude of caring, you have to understand where they are coming from and what motivates them.

This generation cares about the world ecosystem, about family, about quality of life. Directing goals through this lens can get them involved. This is also an entitlement generation. They believe everyone is equal and they do not strive for advancement. They want truth and no false promises. They want inclusiveness and work best when everyone is treated as family. There are many books on working with Millennials and if you are experiencing problems understanding the thoughts of this generation, it may be advantageous to read up

on how they think. Others can be motivated by making them feel a part of the team, by understanding who they are and by appreciating them as individual achievers.

4. Evaluation and communication. This could be in the form of KPI (Key Performance Indicator) tracking or just a simple spreadsheet. Every month you need to examine where you've been and where you are going. Create a graph so you can see how you are trending. This makes it much more visual and understandable.

Evaluate and then communicate with everyone involved. Many companies communicate only with supervisors. They look at associates as machines and figure they don't need to know. A culture of this type will never succeed. If you communicate with your people correctly they feel like valuable members of the team. This helps to build a family atmosphere and builds satisfaction and contentment for workers.

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