

The Manager's Role in Your Dealership - Part 3

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In my October article titled, "The Motivation Myth," I wrote about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The person who fits best in management is the one who is at (or strives for) level four – esteem needs. These individuals seek responsibility and a sense of accomplishment – something a good manager finds in competently performing his or her function. While this can be someone internally (as I discussed last month), there are some pitfalls, so leave your options open.

External candidates, even people outside your own industry, may have the management skills you seek. These candidates can bring a fresh perspective to your company. New ideas and ways of doing things might be just what you need.

Within your industry, you have a great source of referrals and information in your Association. Dealerships are merging and in some cases closing, which puts some very qualified people into the job market. Your Association may be able to provide leads for recruiting these candidates.

If you advertise for a position, don't limit yourself by specifying that experience in your industry is a prerequisite for consideration. You are looking for a leader – someone with above average interpersonal skills who understands teamwork and how to help others excel. Don't discount people with management experience in other fields because, most of the time, you can teach them about your industry and your specific company.

You will need to obtain a resume (if nothing else, it gives you an idea of writing ability) and an application. The interview is, as always, key to making your selection. With external candidates who have prior management experience, there is an extra step – a very thorough background check with a twist. If possible, have the candidate provide contact information for at least two people who worked for him/her. Your conversation with these references should include delving into the candidate's management style, strengths and weaknesses.

Once you have your new manager on board, it's important to introduce them to the group they will lead. Whether the person comes from inside the company or outside, you should make an effort to personally introduce them to the group and provide some background information about their qualifications. Ask the group to welcome the new manager and help him/her get acquainted.

I personally don't agree with telling a new manager which employees are troublesome or exemplary. An individual with true management abilities should be able to form his/her own opinions and, most likely, will come to you to verify them. However, you should offer to make personnel files available to a new manager.

Like all employees, managers may require some training. Due to the nature of management work, some training will be related to the Human Resource function. One of the responsibilities of management is to ensure that your company operates within applicable HR laws. In fact, inept management and supervision can be blamed for the majority of lawsuits and charges brought by employees.

Management errors can lead to expensive problems for your company. Common management mistakes involve:

- Mishandling employee complaints – especially harassment complaints
- Failure to address and resolve workplace conflicts
- Failure to document problems
- Creating a perception of retaliation when complaints are made
- Fostering favoritism - inconsistent application of policies and discipline
- Failure to give appropriate feedback or to conduct effective performance evaluations
- Ignoring provisions of a company handbook or other written policies
- Careless use of e-mail

It is well worth the cost and effort to train managers (and supervisors) in basic employment laws. The intent is not to make them HR experts but to overview the pitfalls of FMLA, ADA, EEOC and the rest of the alphabet soup that governs employment. General HR seminars are a cost-effective way to increase awareness. (In fact, you might benefit from accompanying them to a few seminars.) Courses in management or HR are available at most junior colleges or through correspondence or online course work. Think of this training as preventive medicine – you could prevent a major workplace illness such as a sexual harassment lawsuit. Training is not a one-time deal. Annual or bi-annual refresher training is important too, since employment law is ever changing.

I hope this series has provided you with some food for thought about management and supervisory positions within your organization. You already know how important these employees are to the success of your company. (Not to mention the fact that, without them, you would have to handle everything yourself.) In the end, though, you are the ultimate manager of your enterprise and so I ask, would you hire you?

Thank you, as always, for reading my articles. If you have ideas for topics, questions or input (positive or negative), contact me via the HR Help Line at 800-683-3440 or by e-mail at lesley@taxfavoredbenefits.com