



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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Program Seeks to Improve Communication by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Workplace discord is a common complaint among business owners. The conflict can result in poor employee morale and decreased sales. Chris Elliott of Proffit Marketing, a Green Bay company, addresses this problem on a daily basis. He directs the "About Me Card" program that is designed to break down communication barriers and workplace stress by helping employees express how they wish to be treated.

Starting with a survey, employees describe their motivations of life. From this information, a profile is developed that focuses on motivational characteristics and outlines strengths that they bring to the team. When this personal information is shared, understanding begins.

I asked Elliott what happens when employees respond to the survey by describing how they want to be rather than how they are. He said, "We have found that it doesn't matter. Those who answer it as who they *want* to be are really answering it as who they are. They have been told whom they should be for so long, that they have become that person. It validates them."

After the survey, the next step is taking the information and summarizing it on an "About Me Card". This card tells others about this person - what can be expected, phrases that they relate to them, and rules of engagement. The About Me Card helps people express themselves. Elliott noted, "By showing the card to fellow employees and customers, you break down misunderstandings and can really begin to assemble a powerful team."

Some employees like Vinnie Pontius, sales manager of Dahl Automotive, were leery when first asked to participate. "When I came aboard as sales manager, they made me do this About Me Card thing and I was like...what the heck is this? I just want to sell cars and make money. I had resistance, but the more I actually starting using it, I was surprised how much it helped me work with other employees."

Whether using this program or another, Elliott says that team members benefit from knowing more about each other. By taking the time to understand that each person is unique, it is easier to get along and appreciate the differences. "This is where a breakthrough in communication occurs and teams function as teams because they understand each other," he said.

Other benefits are increased motivation, conflict resolution, stress reduction, understanding who to hire, putting the right people in the right job, better performance reviews, and communicating better with customers and prospects.

All types of businesses have used the program, and found it successful. Alan Alden, director of stores for the TA Solberg Company, took it to his workforce of more than 1,000 employees. For him, the process of defining employee strengths has resulted in helping to develop leaders. “We had people who had been with us for years and we looked at this as a tool to identify leaders. It has been successful in doing that,” Alden said.

If you’d like to learn more, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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