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THIN THE HERD: **FIRE NON-PERFORMING** EMPLOYEES



by John Tschohl

There's a term ranchers use when they are reducing the size of livestock by removing weak animals from the group. That term is "thinning the herd." It could also be used in the workforce in relation to terminating non-performing employees, something most organizations don't do nearly as often as they should.

Retaining employees who perform poorly is expensive both financially and emotionally. It costs a lot of money to repair the damage they do. That includes the time it takes to correct mistakes they've made, dealing with a significant number of customer complaints, driving down morale, creating friction, and in-fighting.

It also has an impact on morale and results in an increase in employee turnover. High achievers—those employees who show up on time every day, work hard, and do more than is expected of them—won't want to stay with you. They won't respect you and will soon be heading out the door to work for someone who doesn't tolerate bad employees.

They notice when you give poor performing employees a pass and will start to question your ability to lead and to make good decisions. They will also resent you for relying on them to pick up the slack. You should do everything in your power to keep high-achieving employees.

Keeping employees who perform at substandard levels can also impact you personally and professionally. Bad employees can take you down with them.

When your superiors realize what you are costing the company by not firing those employees, you could very well be overlooked for promotions—or get fired yourself.

So, how do you go about letting those employees go? First, you must realize you can't save them from themselves. They simply don't care about their performance, you, or your company. Cut them loose.

Good managers can identify the negative traits of an employee within the first 30 days. That includes job knowledge, job fit and performance. At year one, you should have a clear record of performance reviews. Take notes, document problems, and track corrective action.

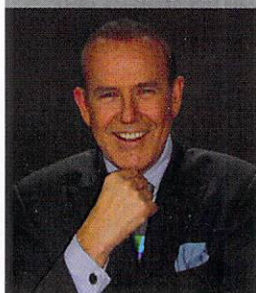
Make sure employees understand what is expected of them and why.

If you expect an employee to improve, both of you should understand what that improvement should look like. Schedule a time to review those expectations and benchmarks. If they haven't been met, it's termination time.

Firing someone can seem heartless at times, but actually, continuing to employ people who routinely fail is a disservice to them and to your organization. On the positive side, it might serve as a wake-up call to those employees and spur them on to improve their skills, their attitudes, and their performances.

It can take some time to recover and rebuild your team spirit after terminating bad employees. It can leave you feeling empty and exhausted, but you can turn things around by quickly getting back on track and doing whatever it takes to build a strong, cohesive team of employees who respect you for "thinning the herd." ◀

JOHN TSCHOHL



John Tschohl is the founder and president of the Service Quality Institute—the global leader in customer service—with operations in more than 40 countries. He is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on all aspects of customer service and has developed 17 customer service training programs, including Speed, that are used by companies throughout the world. His monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit www.customer-service.com. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.