

Why we all pay for poor employee self-esteem

“The greatest evil that can befall man is that he should think ill of himself.” This quote by Goethe is as relevant today in business as it was when he said it more than 200 years ago.

Our workers' self-esteem, which is defined as the value of a person regardless of performance, is constantly being bombarded. This subtle, common, daily attack by business is gauged toward increasing profits by dismissing a person's worth and tricking employees into evaluating their merit by their most recent performance.

Despite increased business psychological sophistication, many companies still follow this low and short-lived road to increased profits. Take the experience that happened to me recently, for instance.

I was checking out at a large, national-chain drugstore. The cashier rang up my purchases, which amounted to more than \$40. When finished, the clerk looked me straight in the eye and said, "Is that all?" I was taken aback. I didn't feel that spending \$40 was an insignificant amount. The more I thought about this exchange while waiting for my purchases to be packaged, the more I became resentful. I thought, who's doing whom the favor? I guess the cashier forgot that, without me, he wouldn't have a job.

Unfortunately, the current hype of moving to a predominant service economy is not based on service, but rather on the old credo that the best way to sell is by intimidation. Make people feel insecure, not in the mainstream, and they will do or buy anything to help make them feel normal.

Look at how advertising intimidates. Ads sell on emotions, not on facts. And those emotions are usually

twisted. Smoke cigarettes, for example, and ride off on a horse. Buy an expensive car, and the sexy girl comes with it. If you don't buy this watch, you'll crack under pressure. Buy yourself an all-wheel-drive vehicle, even though most owners have never had these trucks off a paved road. The desire for acceptance is the backbone of our free-market economy.

However, what business forgets—and what history has demonstrated over and over—is that intimidation offers only a short-term expedient. We only have to look at the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union or the current decline of the tobacco industry as poignant examples.

Self-esteem is destiny. The degree of employee self-esteem is the single most important determinant of a company's future. The large drugstore chain forgot that breeding distrust among its employees would eventually dribble down to the customer. When the customer feels distrust, he or she will no longer buy. This distrust is bred by the customer who ultimately questions his or her self-worth.

In the meantime, try this response to the cashier. The next time the cashier says to you, "Is that all?", say back

with pride, "Isn't that enough?"

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