

## Employers, Employees and the Environment



Three interesting articles came across my desk. They were all about employers, employees and the environment in the workplace. Together, they painted a frightening picture of how every company's greatest asset—their people—are faring.

The first one from The Beacon Journal business section had a headline that read "Bad bosses hurt workers and firms." The article was about the increasing need for employees to put up with abusive bosses during tough economic times. Not too surprising.

The thing that got my attention, though, was research cited that shows that 17% of all employees report being mistreated at work.

Bullying bosses are, in some cases, almost revered in circles where the emphasis is on bottom-line profitability at any price. As long as management makes their numbers, no one worries about the price staff members may be paying.

The second article from Progressive Distributor was captioned "Job burnout is a dragon scorching the modern workplace." During good economic times, burnout is caused by workers having too much to do in too little time. In bad times burnout comes from downsizing and from fear of losing your job.

Employee absenteeism is down right now because workers are afraid that they will lose their jobs if they take sick days or other time off.

Instead, though, burned out employees are physically and emotionally exhausted, cynical and ineffective in their jobs. Those who study burnout have found it to be more of a social

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than an individual problem. It is highly contagious and will spread rapidly through an organization.

And an article titled "Targeting Depression: An Employer's Approach" appeared in Business & Health Institute.

Each year, twenty percent of all employees experience mild to major bouts of depression, but nearly two-thirds go undiagnosed and untreated even though the vast majority could be easily treated and successfully return to normal activities.



Instead, the 19 million Americans suffering from depression generate extremely high medical and disability costs and add to the increasing cost of health care benefits.

**How does all of this apply to you?**

*Think about it. By its very nature, retail requires employees to work long hours and on nights and weekends. Retail workers can't easily schedule time for their own family, friends and loved ones.*

Add to that the complexity of our industry now. Technology continues to bring new, innovative products to our floor. Remember the stress you felt in showing a totally new product to a customer for the first time? With each new product addition, employees have to start a long learning curve so that they feel comfortable demonstrating the new features and benefits to their customers.

Customer service workers can never win. No one ever calls a technician to tell him that his or her new dishwasher is working great. Imagine a career where you can only get work when people are unhappy.

How about your skills as a manager? Most independent dealers came to the business through their service businesses, their families or because of an interest or hobby. Few came with extensive human resource backgrounds.

Your team members are not commodities that can be easily replaced. They are essential links between your company and your suppliers and customers. They represent your business in your community. They can ensure your success or bring your business tumbling down.

Learn about your management style and see if it produces enthusiastic, engaged staff members. Find out if their work is rewarding to them. Make sure they know that you'll get them some help when they feel buried.

Get to know each of your employees individually. Find out what motivates each one and reward them with things that appeal to them specifically. Make time for communication and active listening with every team member.

No one should dread getting up to go to work. Work doesn't have to cause burnout and depression. The best workplaces produce teams of closely-knit workers who are committed to the company, its values and its goals. You can usually tell great places to work by the smiles on the faces of those lucky enough to work there.

