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Sharpen Your Tools

Jeff Havens

Simple Ways to Ruin Your Professional Relationships

Words of Warning

Let's assume for a moment that you are the parent of two young children, a boy and a girl. Your typical day consists of approximately 487,352 things that you need to do:

6:02 a.m. – Wake your son and daughter.

6:07 a.m. – Politely ask your children to take a shower.

6:10 a.m. – Pack a lunch for your daughter to take to school, and remember to stuff \$3 into your son's backpack because he insists on a hot lunch.

6:12 a.m. – Carry your son into the shower while he screams, "I don't want to shower!"

6:23 a.m. – Tell your daughter to get dressed.

6:25 a.m. – Make breakfast, and maybe scarf down a bowl of cereal while you've got two minutes to yourself.

6:28 a.m. – Tell your daughter to change out of the horrible combination of clothes she's decided to wear.

6:31 a.m. – Mediate an argument consisting almost entirely of "He started it!" and "No, she did!"

6:34 a.m. – Finally, remember to change out of your pajamas.

And that doesn't even include the trips to the grocery store; the endless ferrying back and forth to school, soccer practice, piano recitals and sleepovers; or the helping with homework; or ... well, you get the idea. You're probably exhausted just reading this.

The Facilities Manager's Role

Now, let's imagine that you have 25, 53 or 126 children, all clamoring for your attention and who all seem to have massive problems occurring every single day. Congratulations, you're a facilities manager!

I hardly need to tell you that your job is a constant flurry of phone calls, disaster mitigation, on-site visits, follow-up surveys and a couple hundred other things that all need to be done right now. At times your job can definitely seem overwhelming, and you want to give up and let the facilities you manage figure things out for themselves.

What Not to Do

If that's the case, here are a few simple strategies to ensure that your facilities feel neglected, underserved and otherwise poorly treated.

Provide incomplete information to your customers. When a restaurant manager calls you to get an update on a particular repair or renovation, give them vague answers that don't actually answer anything. Every repair or remodel is costing the restaurant owner money, and nothing will annoy them quite like telling them that their repair will be finished "soon" or "some time."

The best of you will avoid talking to them entirely so they are in a constant state of nervous anxiety until the repair is finished—or better yet, you tell them that it's going to take longer than expected. Serves them right for bothering you in the first place.

Make fewer on-site visits. Face-to-face interaction is way overrated. I have several hundred friends on Facebook,

and I feel just as close to each of them as I do to the people I see on a regular basis. And with gas prices being what they are, this one will save you a lot of money. Besides, I know you're sick of driving all over the country just to stare at a repaved parking lot.

This will also help you do a worse job of vetting any new vendors you might be adding into your rotation. If a potential vendor's website says that they're reliable, I'm pretty sure you can trust that—no need to contact their former clients to get an independent assessment. Don't you feel like you've already made enough phone calls for one lifetime?

Let your smaller customers know that they're your smaller customers. This one's pretty self-explanatory, and it is just as good an idea as it would be to let your children know which one of them you like the most. Every customer in every industry wants to believe that they're special, and when they call you with an order or a problem they like to believe that they are your only priority in that specific moment. This means you can really surprise and aggravate them by letting them know you have bigger issues to deal with.

"I'd love to help you right now, but I've got more important clients who need my time and attention. Really, it's your fault for being small in the first place. You deserve second-class treatment." Repeat that to yourself every day until you can say it with a straight face—it should take about a month.

Make promises you have no ability to deliver. This is slightly more common in newer businesses, but only slightly. Your goal here is to overextend yourself to the point where you have no ability to address any issue that you haven't carefully planned for, a fantastic idea in an industry like yours where most of the problems occur without warning. I mean seriously, what are the odds that something is going to break without being courteous enough to give you several months' notice first? It almost never happens.

There are other techniques, of course, but this should be a decent start. An excellent restaurant facilities manager will make regular follow-up calls, provide detailed and specific information, and visit every facility often enough to have a personal relationship with the people who run each facility. But you don't need to shoot for excellence; being OK at your job is perfectly fine. Just like it's perfectly fine to be an OK parent.

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