



The holidays are here: Are your employees ready?

Ready or not, the holiday season has arrived. Several strong months of retail sales growth has led economists to believe that business should be better this year than it has been in the recent past. It seems clear that the economy is picking up momentum just in time for the holidays.

Holiday sales are forecast to grow at least 4 percent for all retail sectors. This means more customers, more activity, more complaints, higher stress, increased workload and less time

off for employees to do their own holiday shopping.

As employers, one of your first steps will be to make sure you have enough staff in place to handle vacation coverage and increased activity. Depending on your type of business, you may want to consider recruiting some on-call workers. This will ensure the help will be available to you if you need it.

Once you've made logistic preparations to handle the holiday

season, the next step is to make sure that your employees are up to the challenge. For veterans, gearing up for the holiday season is a routine part of the job, one they may even look forward to. But for first timers the holiday rush and potential problems that can accompany it – can be somewhat intimidating.

Regardless of the experience of your employees, it is up to you to make sure they are all ready to tackle the season.

Here are a few things to consider as you prepare your employees for the Holiday Season:

- Update reference materials** – Plan ahead, and make sure all employee references and guidebooks are up-to-date and easily accessible.
- Sharpen service skills** – It's a great idea to have a refresher training to help employees relearn skills and maintain effectiveness.
- Fortify team morale** – Impatient & short-tempered customers may challenge your employees' goodwill; make sure you maintain a supportive & nurturing environment to prevent customer negativity from dampening the enthusiasm of your staff.
- Plan Breaks** – Schedule a chance for employees to recharge their batteries. Provide holiday treats or decorations to maintain positivism.

Quick Hands-On Stress Relief

Got a minute? Get a massage – a self-massage that is. Try these!

The scalp smoother. Place thumbs behind your ears and spread fingers on top of your head. Move your scalp back and forth slightly making circles with your fingertips.

The eye easer. Close your eyes and place your ring fingers directly under your eyebrows, near the bridge of your nose. Slowly increase pressure, then gently release.

The shoulder saver. Place your left hand on the right side of your neck by your shoulder. Press your fingers firmly into the muscle while tucking your chin in toward your chest.

The palm pleaser. Lace your fingers together, leaving thumbs free. Slowly knead your left thumb into the palm of your right hand. Repeat on your left hand.

ALONG WITH THE HOLIDAYS COME THE STRESSFUL DAYS!

The holidays should revolve around the inner things. They should be seen as a time when we can relax our bodies, calm our minds, and refresh our souls. Instead of encouraging us to do less, society begs us to do more. The holidays only add to the already heightened anxiety in the workplace. Check out these stress-relieving tips:

- 1. Get the members of your household to make a list of holiday expectations** (i.e., what they want to see, do feel experience). Share your lists and discuss.
- 2. Get enough sleep.** Fatigue can lead to stress, overeating, and a number of family problems.
- 3. Consider extending holiday get-togethers** through the first two weeks of January, rather than shoehorning everything into November and December.
- 4. Make a budget and stick to it.** (Don't forget hidden expenses: travel, postage, cleaning supplies, etc.)
- 5. Draw names** and put a dollar limit on gifts if you have a large family.
- 6. Consider giving homemade gifts.**

THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

Unfortunately many of the factors that employees will cherish most about their jobs in the upcoming decades, will be the very things that employers will find even more difficult to offer them. Changes in demographics coupled with a shifting industrial base, will considerably impact future job satisfaction.

As the market becomes increasingly competitive, the need for positive attitudes among employees is taking on even greater importance. Recent research clearly indicates that employees' willingness to deal with co-workers and administration in a considerate, attentive fashion is strongly correlated with their attitudes toward their work lives: satisfied employees consistently are more courteous and pleasant than are dissatisfied employees.

How does your organization stack up?

YES NO

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the number of customer complaints risen over the last two years? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have your employees been utilizing their sick days more frequently? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has turnover within your organization greatly increased over the last two years? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you feel disconnected from your employees, and their opinions regarding working with you? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are your employees unhappy with your pay practices? |

If you answered "Yes" to one or more of the questions above, planning ahead and focusing on the issues that can be changed will go a long way in maintaining and improving your employee job satisfaction. D. Gallant Management Associates offers a hands-on survey that measures employee perceptions and attitudes. The survey gives Management an accurate diagnosis of how employees feel about each element of their working lives, and it identifies those opinions that have greatest impact on job performance. It also involves employees in solving their own work-related problems.

Employee attitudes directly impact the "bottom line" success of an organization.

Call our offices at (207) 773-4800, for more information on our Employee Satisfaction Services.

July 2003 Survey Results: Top Ways Companies are Controlling Compensation Costs

1. Reduced Merit Pool	45.4 %
2. Hiring Freeze, Laid off Employees	37.3 %
3. Reduced Size of Bonus	20.4 %
4. Instituted Real Pay for Performance	17.4 %
5. Changed Mix of Salary/Bonus Structure	16.0 %
6. Tighter Tie to the Market with Market Strategies	14.3 %

What is a Company's Most Expensive Benefit?

- a. Medical Insurance
- b. Retirement Plan
- c. Paid Time Off**
- d. Training



Did you know? According to a survey of all industries conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in July 2003, the average cost of benefits as a percent of base pay was reported to be **33%**.

Source: IOMA – Institution of Management & Administration

Looking for a FUN way to train your staff?

Try D. Gallant Management Associates' New Interactive Customer Service Game!

This board game is an entertaining way to get your employees energized and excited about caring for the customer by focusing on communications and teams while utilizing your organization's goals, values and mission.

It is a comprehensive customer service training tool that can be tailored to your staff's specific needs and was specifically designed to enhance service attitudes and skills.

Participants learn about the importance of a customer-focused attitude, how to represent the corporate mission, building rapport, using positive language, and how to motivate fellow team members.

This board game with dice, multiple boards, flash cards and player pieces can accommodate up to 60 people at a time. Give us a call today, for more information on this very exciting and beneficial customer service training tool!

"Many of us commented on the fact that it got CBEC talking about ways that we could improve service to our patients. In particular we really enjoyed how the game allowed us to voice our appreciation for our co-workers."

Becki Darling
Corporate Manager
Casco Bay Eye Care



Watch for the *President's Corner* piece on

"Behavior Based Interviewing"

by Deborah Gallant,

in the February 2004 issue of this Newsletter!