



AT THE HELM

# At Your Fingertips

Most of us spend a great deal of time and energy attempting to figure out what our customers want and need. We create customer bills of rights, we pore over customer comments, and we laud CSI scores as if they were the Holy Grail. And for good reason. These processes, are valuable in helping us better understand our customers and in creating desired performance standards.

What many of us neglect to do, however, is research an even greater source of information: our own employees.

Those dealers who are navigating the industry certification program are learning the power of employee feedback firsthand. Many say their employee survey results have been the most powerful part of the entire certification process.

We were on hand at two of the dealer certification workshops, peering over the shoulders of dealer principals who were anxiously reviewing the results from their employee surveys. Comments ranged from tips for operational or procedural improvements to flaming red flags regarding high-level managers who were universally thought to be toxic to the company. And on all accounts, the feedback gave those dealers who cared enough to take it seriously an opportunity to substantially improve their business.


If you truly want to grow your business, you have to care about your employees as much as – I'd argue *more than* – you care about your customers. It is this group of people that makes your business tick. They work on the frontlines with those customers you spend all the money to attract, sell and develop loyalty with. Your employees oftentimes make or break your CSI scores. And there's no doubt that they affect your profitability.

Therein lies the dilemma: Many businesses, both large and small, seldom solicit employee feedback because owners equate "feedback" with "whining." For others, it's far easier to put blinders on than it is to take them off. The reason? Once the blinders have willingly been removed, action must be taken, and that action can oftentimes be painful.

Believe it or not, your employees often know your company better than you do. They have the inside track on how the company operates, what holds it back and what opportunities exist. Sadly, though, this wealth of information goes untapped.

The certified marine dealers are required to ask their employees for feedback on an ongoing basis. The employee satisfaction survey focuses on such topics as the dealership's values, its managers' attitudes, job-specific responsibilities and rewards and recognition.

Perhaps most importantly, though, it asks for written comments on any other topic that might be important to the employee, so that the survey reflects real insight rather than just feedback on the topics management deems important.

It's sad that it takes a formal certification program to help us realize that the most critical business information we could ever want or need has been right at our fingertips all along. 

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