

Competition Or Cooperation

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Competition in the workplace is good. Competition brings out the best in us, motivates us to do things we could not otherwise do, and achieve levels many thought not possible. While competition crowns winners, it also defines losers. But, the losers may not be the people you think they are. And that's the problem –sometimes when we win, our customers lose.

It has been said, there is no better way to hone your skills and improve your performance, than competition. Competing with others, or even with yourself, fosters continued improvement, striving for even higher goals, and an ongoing sense of achievement. Competition in the world of business is natural and expected. Every business has competitors that are vying for the dollars in the marketplace. And over the years, some of these competitions have been classic. Coke versus Pepsi comes to mind, as does Avis versus Hertz in the rental car industry.

Years ago Miller Lite had commercials where two factions of their fans competed over the reason to buy their product. As a crowd gathered half the group would shout out "Less Filling!!" while the other half would retort "Tastes Great!!!" They were humorous commercials with Miller Lite being the only real competitor. These classic competitions served to strengthen the product itself and made the competitors stronger. In effect, both Pepsi and Coke won, as did Avis and Hertz.

Competition can be a very intense experience and a very rewarding one, or it can be enormously destructive. - Andrea Lawrence - Ski Champion

What about competition inside your workplace? Can you improve morale or increase motivation through a contest? Does internal competition make your department stronger, or does it divide the group into "winners" and "losers", with the real loser being the customer?

This was the question posed by a client recently. She runs a national organization that is divided into 6 geographic regions, each producing basically the same product. Her desire was to increase productivity by having the 6 regions compete for cash prizes and trips. "Morale has been a little low recently, and I figure a 6 month contest with the winner at the end getting a pretty substantial prize will be a big boost!!" she said.

While this was an interesting idea, she needed to approach it carefully and ensure that the competition was designed to serve the customer and not just create internal excitement. Sometimes 'winning' the competition becomes a goal unto itself and when winning the game becomes the goal, your customer can be the loser.

Positive internal competitions are marked by strong, resilient teams looking to move their productivity to even higher levels. You tap the creativity of your people and ask them to find new and innovative ways to accomplish their goals. And while doing so, they keep their eye on the real prize, improving the customer's experience. Then, when the competition draws to a close, your internal systems and processes have improved, you've created energy in the organization, your customers receive tremendous benefits and you've improved your bottom line. At that point, the company AND the customers are winners.

Ultimately, that is the goal of every competition in the workplace. But it doesn't always turn out that way.

What would make it a "bad" competition?

Bad competitions are marked by the following characteristics:

1. The groups are not well organized or well led. Productivity is bad and competition is viewed as a last resort to increase the numbers.
2. There are clear "winners" and "losers" of the competition. Instead of trying to move everyone forward, the winners are hyped and the others are castigated for not doing enough.
3. At some level in the management chain "winning the competition" is equated with earning a promotion or even keeping their jobs.
4. The competition is used as a motivation technique. Motivation and rewards are often confused, but distinctly different.
5. The people actually engaged in the competition don't view it as a test of their creativity, but as one more way to try and pry more work from them.

The Law of Win/Win says, "Let's not do it your way or my way; let's do it the best way. - Greg Anderson - American Author

The key to a positive competition lies in the win/win nature of the contest itself. When your contests have losers, you can rest assured that, when you do your final accounting, company morale and the customers will both be sure losers.

An engaged and energized workforce leads to higher productivity, reduced costs, improved customer service, and increased profitability. Employee engagement happens when your Corporate Culture, Leadership Style, and Employee Expectations are in synch.

The Fusion Program from ECI Learning Systems is designed to align these 3 concepts in your organization – engaging your employees and creating positive energy that will propel your company to new heights.

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