



People



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3 Key HR tips to keep customers while expanding your small business

At the outset, the main goal of a small business is to attract a customer base with which they can build a foundation.

But as they expand small businesses often risk losing the mom and pop feel that set them apart from their competitors and attracted those key core customers.

By communicating their values, listening to their customers, expanding gradually, and keeping their product consistent, entrepreneurs can continue to provide an intimate small business relationship with their customer, even as they expand into much larger markets.

Communicate Your Values

According to Rana Florida, CEO of [Creative Class Group](#), an advisory services firm, small businesses can maintain their quality of product and integrity while expanding by making company values clear to all employees.

“If you communicated the core mission and the culture to the organization and everyone’s onboard with that vision, I think it’s easier to grow and expand,” she says. “As long as that is really communicated clearly and the leader gets the team excited about the vision, than I think it can maintain its mom and pop feel.”

In her new book, *Upgrade: Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary*, Florida outlines her seven principles for achieving life and business goals. One of those seven principles is collaboration, which she describes as “understanding that every leader had to engage and inspire a team.”

Florida adds that while entrepreneurs will always be excited about their product or service, they need to be able to pass that enthusiasm down to other staff members, especially during expansion.

“It’s not going to work if the leader is sitting up at the top wagging the finger, telling staff to work harder,” she says. “The way expansion really works and maintains a culture, brand and a vision that’s exciting is by getting the entire team excited and rallied around that vision. Once they become excited, they become brand ambassadors.”

Put Systems in Place

Brian Scudamore, founder and CEO of garbage collectors [1-800-GOT-JUNK?](#), also puts an emphasis on communicating his core values to staff, however he believes that checks and balances are needed in order to keep the culture consistent.

“People don’t fail, systems do,” he says. “You have to have the right systems, processes in place that as you scale and it’s no longer mom or pop running the business, so to speak. You need to have checklists in place and proper training systems to ensure that everyone you hire are the right people, and that everyone you hire has been trained properly, and that they’ve been tested properly on their training.”

Scudamore founded his company in 1989 with \$700 and an old pickup truck. Today, 1-800-GOT-JUNK? has over 175 locations in North America and Australia.

“I spent the first 10 years of my business career really documenting everything we did,” he says. “My goal was to take everything, from ‘how do you load the truck?’ to ‘how do you price a job?’ to ‘how do you answer the phone at the call centre?’ everything we did I put down into a one-page best practice sheet.”

Though it took eight years for the company to reach one million dollars in sales, Scudamore had big plans from the very beginning, and made sure all of the small touches that his core customers appreciated weren’t lost along the way.

Scudamore has also moved these principles to a new company he’s founded, [You Move Me.](#)

“We ask every customer every single time, we call them up en route to the job and say, ‘good morning Mrs. Smith, we’re en route, just wanted to let you know we’ll be there in approximately 30 minutes. We’re going to stop and pick up coffee, and because we know you packed your coffee maker, what would you like?’” he says.

Don't Change a Winning Recipe

Like Scudamore, Lori Joyce, co-founder of [Original Cupcakes by Heather and Lori](#), was cautious to not let rapid expansion compromise the quality of her product, even though she could make more money by switching to cheaper ingredients.

“We'll never modify the product that we started with,” she says. “We're a 1950's inspired wholesome bakery that makes cupcakes the way your grandmother used to. We want to continue being who we are, with an emphasis on not changing or modifying our recipe.”

Original Cupcakes by Heather and Lori currently has eight locations, and plans to reach 12 by the end of 2013. Joyce says that the key to her company's growth has been listening to her original customers, and emphasizing the qualities that kept bringing them back for more.

“Once you get your customer hooked on something, at a minimum that's their expectation,” she says. “The customer is the boss. If I don't listen to them, or I get so big that I don't think I need to listen to them, it will take no time for my business to be over.”

- See more at: <http://www.starbusinessclub.ca/people/3-key-hr-tips-to-keep-customers-while-expanding-your-small-business/#respond>