

Fire the Manager Approach

Too many employees work for their boss rather than their company or their clients. Businesses these days are filled with multiple layers of management, and employees often find themselves playing politics and focusing on tasks to make their boss happy.

At the end of the day, the company quickly forgets what their goals are and what they are in business to do -- and everyone is focusing on the task at hand with little sense of how it fits into the bigger picture.

If you notice this in your workplace, your top-down hierarchy is the culprit.

By eliminating this model at my digital marketing agency, Ciplex, we created a company people love working at, and saved money in the process. Our customer satisfaction went up, and the quality of work improved. We have happier employees, satisfied clients, lowered costs, and a better company overall.

Here's how I did it:

Create a Team Culture

I created small three to five person teams and removed any 'bosses' those teams or team members had. I also dismantled any "senior" or "VP" titles within the team. Though leaders will naturally emerge within a team, there's no need to have a strict reporting structure. Your senior employees may initially be taken aback by this idea, but it's important to remind them that the changes in culture and work habits will lead to increased productivity and motivation. Let your team choose their own titles, without implementing hierarchy, and have teams measure their own performance so they can learn and grow.

Set Goals

Employees need to work collectively--not just as task-doers. After creating teams, I gave each team a goal, one that could easily be measured in short intervals--like one or two weeks. This helps employees to see exactly what outcome they're working for--they now focus on the why and no longer on the how. Given a goal and consistent short time-frames, teams are able to measure their performance and learn from previous mistakes, allowing them to improve during the next time interval. Establish the philosophy of team goals, and employees will no longer feel as if they're just "doing tasks for the boss." Employees will appreciate the effort to allow their team (or even individual team members) ownership and responsibility of the goal. If they need help, they have a support layer, but no hierarchy is involved.

Provide Support, Not Escalation

In a hierarchal workplace, escalation occurs when a problem arises. Instead of team support, you get individual workers passing problems off to other people. And when a problem is passed, so is

its ownership. In my model, managers and bosses are repositioned as team support, working for the teams, helping them in whatever they need. Former high-level executives provide help and support, rather than telling employees what to do or how to do it. Getting rid of company hierarchy means client or customer satisfaction becomes priority and ownership stays with the team. Since no one is able to “pass the buck” when a problem comes up--everyone will tackle problems collectively. No more navigating departments and roles (politics) that once divided them.

Take Money Off the Table

By default, salaries are hierarchal. When you flatten your company hierarchy, you don't have to flatten salaries to make them equal for everyone--but you do have to talk to your employees. Ask what they need to feel comfortable on a monthly basis. We didn't lower any salaries, but we did give out some raises. Create pay levels that are tied to performance, not job titles and seniority. As soon as your employees aren't constantly worrying about money, your culture can thrive. Remember, you want your employees to work towards a team goal, not towards their paycheck.

Remove Rules, Give Autonomy

No one likes to feel they're living under authoritarian rule. Autonomy is one of the biggest motivators, so let your employees act like the adults they are. By removing unnecessary rules and offering flexibility, they can determine how much they need to be in the office on a given day, or whether or not they'll be able to take a vacation next week. Structures like strict work hours, location requirements, limited vacation time, fancy titles, and even employee reviews scream one message: employees are working to satisfy rules--not to meet goals.

Lead, Don't Manage

Dismantling your company hierarchy means your teams will measure their own success, giving you the freedom to lead instead of manage. Don't correct employees or solve their problems--guide and support them with leadership instead. If there's a problem, ask key questions to guide them to the solution instead of jumping in to take the reins and own the problem.

Reap the Benefits

By flattening our hierarchy and getting rid of the bosses, Cipler's culture has thrived. Our employees are happier because they actually want to come to work every day--they don't feel forced to work because of money, nor do they feel shut out of big decisions. In addition, we watched the quality of work and customer satisfaction increase, while costs were lowered. Grow your company by getting rid of the hierarchy, and you will create a company people love working at.

Could your company culture benefit from dismantling your hierarchy? Why or why not? Share your thoughts in a comment below!

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