



## How's Your ESI Score?

Insights

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No question that *customer* satisfaction is a primary goal and focus for dealerships (and manufacturers). In a highly-competitive industry where products and prices can be virtually identical, dealerships understand that customer satisfaction may be the only difference between them and their competitors. For this reason, entire programs and initiatives are devoted to monitoring and ensuring customer satisfaction. Manufacturers incentivize dealerships and dealerships incentivize employees to focus on making the customer experience the best it can be. Everyone in this business understands that satisfied customers are a key to success.

But what about *employee* satisfaction? In a highly-competitive market for quality employees where competitors offer virtually identical compensation and benefits, the work environment is often the main difference between dealerships. The dealership's success depends on its employees at every phase of the operation.

Dealerships that emphasize providing a satisfying work experience for their employees should find it easier to ensure customer satisfaction. Employees' feelings about their jobs, the dealership, and their managers can directly affect their performance and their customers' opinions about their experience. Employee satisfaction is a key to success.

If you had to guess, what kind of Employee Satisfaction Index ("ESI") score would your dealership have if you surveyed your employees? How would your score compare to the other dealerships in your area, group or region – the same dealerships with which you are competing for top talent? Hopefully you would be above average or even number one. But you may find that there are areas that need immediate improvement. The following relatively straightforward and simple suggestions may help you achieve or maintain an ESI score that will make you proud.

## **Treat Your Employees The Way You Want To Be Treated**

Sound trite and old fashioned? Sure does. Is it a good first step? You bet. Your employees will be more inclined to follow your direction and do what's asked of them when they respect you. Exhibiting leadership and treating your employees fairly and consistently are ingredients for a respectful relationship. Yelling, screaming, threatening and throwing things rarely, if ever, result in respect for you.

Erratic and inconsistent manager behavior creates uncertainty (along with legal risks). In a time where competition for good employees in this industry may be at an all-time high, these old-school and outdated management techniques are counterproductive at best. Good employees, like customers, have options. Wake up.

## **Get To Know Your Employees**

If you want your employees to care about you and the dealership and what you are trying to accomplish, you need to show your employees that you care about them as people. You can't do that if you know nothing about the people with whom you spend the majority of your waking hours and whose performance directly impacts you on several levels. Do you know the first and last name of every employee working under your supervision? What about their hobbies? The names of their significant others?

Their children's names? Children's major school or sports activities? This information provides fodder for small talk that may have big returns.

## **Make Sure Your Open Door Stays Open**

The employees you supervise are likely to have problems, complaints and concerns from time-to-time. Almost all employees do. Some of their problems or concerns may even have legal ramifications. When this happens, wouldn't you want your employees to come to you first and give you a chance to resolve the issue rather than them quitting and/or going outside the dealership for help (e.g., a lawyer, a union, the EEOC or some other government agency)?

Nobody likes to hear complaints. But if you get first shot to address the issue, you maintain control of the situation. Not so if outsiders get involved. If your employees know from your prior actions that it is safe to come to you, that you will listen to them and that you will work to resolve the issues with them, they are likely to give you that first shot. Make sure that your company's open door policy is more than words in a handbook.

## **Listen To Your Employees**

Your employees are on the frontline. Many of them have diverse experiences and backgrounds. There is a strong possibility that they have good ideas and suggestions. By listening to them you may avoid bad decisions and may be able to fix a problem before it gets out of hand. Besides, when you involve your employees and keep them apprised of what's going on, most feel that they are valued and a part of something. These employees are more likely to take an "ownership interest" and perform at a higher level.

## **Recognize Accomplishment And Contribution**

What a no brainer. Who doesn't like a sincere pat on the back? Recognize success – but also recognize effort. Recognize birthdays and anniversaries and other special occasions. Buy lunch on days other than Saturdays. Take them on an appropriate outing. Walk through the shop and thank everyone for their contribution. It's easy. It's cheap. It works.

## **Create A Positive Culture**

This starts with management. Create a workplace where employees want to work – not just for the money. When companies win awards for being one of the best places to work, pay rarely, if ever, is the deciding factor – company culture is. Management creates that culture by what it does and what it does not do, not by what it says.

Allowing a "locker room mentality" to exist is unnecessary and counterproductive and creates avoidable legal risks. When dealerships are going to great lengths to attract high quality employees from outside the industry, having a positive culture is more important today than ever. Do what's right and you will get the right outcome.

## **Set And Apply Standards**

Your employees will follow your lead. If you expect the best, provide them with the opportunity to be the best. Set goals and hold your employees accountable – all employees. The good ones won't mind. Surround your employees with a solid team of solid citizens.

Many times, the best hiring decision you can make is to pass on a questionable applicant, even one with experience. Why poison the well? Remove unproductive, disruptive and problem employees from the workplace as soon as possible. These employees are unlikely to get better, no matter how good you are. Your other employees expect you to do that for the dealership and for them. They will lose respect for you if you do not. Most of all, you have to walk the walk.

Your dealership or department has no chance of sustained success without good employees. Employers that focus on and achieve a high level of employee satisfaction lower the risk that good employees will leave the first time they see what appears to be greener grass. Satisfied employees are less likely to have discipline and attendance issues, seek union or government assistance and present legal challenges. Satisfied employees also are more likely to make your dealership more profitable. Maybe it's time to work on improving your ESI score.

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For more information contact the author at [TCoffey@laborlawyers.com](mailto:TCoffey@laborlawyers.com) or 404.231.1400.

### ***Related People***



**Tillman Y. Coffey**

Partner

404.240.4222

Email