

Ask SCORE

I'm an interior designer who has worked on my own for the last three years. The business has now reached the point where I need to expand and hire staff to assist me. I've never been a "boss" before; can you offer me some tips on how to do it successfully?

As an entrepreneur, you will learn that employees are a vital resource for your small business. They offer your business various skills and talents helping to add value to your products or services. The business cannot succeed without their input.

Unlike your equipment, computers and other resources, however, you can't simply turn employees on and off for business hours. All employees need a clear understanding of their role in your business and how it can grow, plus the motivation to achieve and, even better, exceed those expectations.

That's why you, as the business owner, also hold the title of "Chief Communicator and Motivator."

It's important to have direct contact to make your message clear. Some owners try to save time and manage by e-mail. That works only to a point. But direct contact builds trust and rapport.

Establish your business "mantra" and keep repeating it. Don't assume that everyone involved in the business understands and buys into the mission as you do. After all, you're the one who created it, not them. They haven't lived and breathed every detail as you have.

Here's one simple step to make certain you communicate clearly. Instead of asking if an employee understood your instructions, ask what specific steps the person will take to complete the task. That way you can be absolutely certain they not only understood, but also plan to complete the assignment in an appropriate way.

Avoid constantly criticizing employees. That hurts morale and can make people less motivated. If you highlight the positive and correct mistakes without getting personal, employees are more likely to deliver what you want.

While a good manager is also visible, it's important to not make it appear that you are micromanaging. A quick chat about work and non-work issues during a stroll through your business is all the positive reinforcement is all most employees need. They'll feel more comfortable about coming to you with questions, concerns or suggestions. Augment the informality with individual and group meetings to share information and updates, brainstorm ideas and simply get to know each other. Such interaction will not only help re-energize your staff, but the boss as well!

This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with more than 65 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business counseling and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit www.score-manchester.org for information on counseling, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

Have a question you'd like answered in this column? E-mail it to info@score199.mv.com, with "Ask SCORE" in the subject line.

