

Let's Talk About Your Company's Number One Asset
By
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Let's talk about the assets of your company. The things that make your company work on a daily basis. The assets of any company can be separated into three categories.

First, the tangible, fixed property belonging to a company which may include the building in which the company is housed, the office furniture, vehicles, computers and other equipment with which the company functions on a day-to-day basis. If damaged or destroyed, the company can replace these items for their market value and assuming the loss is not substantial and uninsured, the company continues on.

Secondly, the merchandise that a company deals in, domestically fabricated or imported items, packages handled, held or shipped for other companies, or any other type of equipment, or materials that produce a profit for the company. Again, if damaged or destroyed, the company can replace these items for their market value and assuming the loss is not substantial and uninsured, the company will survive.

Of course the most important of the companies' assets, your employees. They use, handle, deal with, and affect both fixed tangible property and the merchandise or products that are the company's lifeblood.

Of the three assets listed, Your employees are number one. Each employee, if properly trained and guided gains in value to the company over time. If the company loses an employee, they not only lose the physical body, but the knowledge, skills, and experience in the business that no other employee can replace.

Of the three, the employee is the only asset that can learn from mistakes, correct those mistakes, and upon every repetition can complete the tasks with an ever-increasing skill.

The employee can also observe potential problems in other areas, not associated with their own function within the company and suggest improvement to further the company's goals.

Simply stated:

It is better to hire, train, and retain, than to rehire and retrain

Do not underestimate your operators.

The majority of forklift operators are well experienced, capable, individuals. Treat them as the professionals that they are.

Just as in any profession, you have individuals that can operate for twenty years with an outstanding record of safety, and some that lack the proper training, experience, or capability to perform without incident.

Never kid yourself, operating a forklift is not an easy job. It takes a special type of person to accomplish properly what these operators do everyday. In conducting forklift operator safety programs, I have on more than one occasion had the opportunity to have members of management attend the program. As a matter of fact we encourage members of the supervisory and management teams in each of our client's locations to do so.

One example stands out, while conducting a program for forty-five operators, we were pleased to find out that the general manager of this eighty million dollar a year business had taken time out of his day to observe the program. As the program ended, he congratulated us on the program and started to leave,

I asked if he was interested in participating in the hands-on evaluation segment of the program. This gentleman looked stunned, "I can't do that, I don't know how". I explained that we would walk him through the basics so that he could complete the program with his operators, adding that we promised not to tie up a lot of his time, knowing that he had other things to attend to.

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The man agreed, stating that it was because of a minor incident that they had decided to update their training and if he was to convince everyone that he was serious about this, he thought this might allow him to learn more about this area of his business.

The manager sat down on a forklift for the first time in his life and with the help of one of our consultants learned the basics of operating a forklift, he was not fast or even very proficient, but he accomplish what he set out to do.

As he dismounted the forklift, the other operators clapped and cheered for him, letting him know that they were aware that in a small way he was willing to risk embarrassment and possibly lose a little dignity to get his point across.

During the follow-up on this client, the manager told me that he had noticed some changes not only in the operators but also in himself.

"I never realized just how many things an operator has to do at one time, not just operating the equipment, but also watching out for people and objects as you operate and watching the load to make sure it is secure".

He said this experience let him know that the operators that worked for his company was an integral part of the business and that their actions on a daily basis could have an extreme impact of the profitability of that business.

The other thing that he noticed was that he had let the operators know that he was involved. Suddenly employees who in the past had barely said good morning to him were not afraid to speak up if they had a concern, not only involving forklift safety but in other topics such as shipping, or manufacturing.

This one situation of course does not completely close the gap that tends to exist between management and employees in many businesses, but along with other methods, it can help in improving communication, which in many businesses is a real issue.

In talking to other employees in that same business, they said that by taking the time and effort to attend the program with them, the manager had proved to them that he was involved and interested.

Employees in many instances will react to what they think is important to the boss.

This is not in most instances because they are trying to gain points with the boss. I truly believe it is because most employees like to be involved and have some effect on the business they are a part of.

Most employees in American businesses like to have pride in what they do, regardless of whether they run the business or are the rank and file.

Expect your operators to act as professionals.

Just as you expect managerial or supervisory personnel to be held accountable and to be praised and rewarded for their efforts, expect the same of your operators.

After operating a forklift for forty hours a week, every week of the year, these individuals, just like many of us tend to lose their edge because of the sheer repetition of their duties.

When this is observed, let the operator know it. It does not have to have a negative tone to it. It does not have to be confrontational. In fact it can be very positive.

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You probably are not very afraid of recognizing excellent work when you see it, so why be afraid of correcting an issue before it causes a larger problem.

Let the employee know that you are aware of the situation, but that you will rely on his/her judgment and skill to address the problem.

This should be done one-on-one with the operator. If the operator fails to respond to this then you may have to address the issue in a different way.

Later discuss the issue in a safety meeting, of course without discussing who was involved, and solicit ideas and solutions from the other operators.

I know of no business owner, manager, or supervisor that knowingly destroys profit coming in to the business. It would make no sense.

Why then would we ignore the chance to take one of the most important parts of our business and fail to properly utilize and profit from that asset?

Well trained, knowledgeable, employees who are respected and valued, can be the one ingredient that is needed for true success.

Let's give them the tools, knowledge, and support that they need.

Author and keynote speaker Kenneth Hutchins has over 30 years experience in the Safety and Security Industry starting his career as a Law Enforcement Specialist in the United States Air Force and as a police officer in Louisiana and Arkansas

Following this he was involved in Loss Prevention and Safety Management with some of America's largest retailers (Specifically Montgomery Ward, Mervyn's And K-Mart Corporation). Mr. Hutchins' expertise in safety and security and his entertaining presentations have made him a sought after keynote speaker in the private sector.

Author of "Stealing Back Your Profits" a guide for small and mid-size business and of multiple safety programs Mr. Hutchins teaches at several community colleges around Texas. Mr. Hutchins is the founder and President of Industrial Truck Safety, a safety training company based in Houston Texas, serving Texas and neighboring states.

Mr. Hutchins also serves as the Operations Manager of BedRock Electronic Security Technology (BEST) a division of EMCS, Inc guiding the convergence of Physical Security with Information Technology (I.T.) Services and Telecommunications Services