

Family values

Developing a business philosophy built on family values can be the mortar for your company.

Running a business based on family values means surrounding your organization with dedicated, enthusiastic and talented people who strive toward mutual goals. It means interacting and engaging with employees in such a way that it's not about simply knowing their names; it's about sustaining an "open-door policy" that extends far beyond the workplace. It's about sitting down and trying to help them cope with their drinking problems or divorces. It's about attending their weddings or visiting them in the hospital when they aren't well.

More than anything else, it's about being fortunate enough to ask yourself at the end of the day, "Is the making of another dollar more important than this particular family's well-being or that employee's best interest?" It's the people who help you along the way and the passion they invest into their work and your company that captures the difference between success and failure for any business.

Smart Business spoke with Steven Leturno and Daniel Lisowski, co-founders of AIT Worldwide Logistics headquartered in Itasca, Ill., to find out more about the importance of family values.

What are the competitive advantages of a corporate identity that is saturated in and defined by family values?

A business run with a family-focused philosophy gives employees the leeway, flexibility and creativity to be proactive in putting their own personalities into accomplishing their goals. Of course, certain disciplines and skill sets are required for each job, but when you aren't over-managing or micromanaging and when you don't stand over employees with a job manual and expect them to perform the robotics of the job functions contained within the pages, you will be amazed to discover the entrepreneurial spirit that comes to life among employees.

When you run things that way, innovative job descriptions, entire departments, imaginative projects and ambitious goals are evolved and created. Instead of set-



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ting stiff requirements and restrictions, job descriptions should be written in pencil — not pen.

Most people have something to contribute. But when you are simply basing it off a three-line job description, who really knows if that person and that particular job are compatible? You give it the best guess you can, but until you assimilate yourself into a corporate culture, you will never know whether or not you've made a good match.

Is there a downside to bringing family values to a corporate culture in a modern-day workplace?

All business owners have identifiable goals and measurable boundaries for their employees. They hold people accountable in terms of budgets, spending limits and so forth. When people don't stay within those parameters, they subject themselves to potentially severe consequences. A lot of times in corporate America, employees are fired or let go when they don't meet the minimum

requirements of the job. In some publicly traded mega corporations, you're either cutting it or you're not.

But in a business founded on family values, it's black-and-white with a hearty dose of compassion thrown in. Business owners tend to be a lot less rigid in terms of enforcing these consequences, which ultimately works for them or against them. They give people second and third and fourth chances and ample opportunities to improve their job performance. Sometimes it pays off, and sometimes you've wasted time and money on an employee who will never meet expectations.

What can business owners implement to support and/or reinforce these family values?

Offering incentives, such as tuition reimbursements, in-house weight-loss programs and smoking cessation programs, can certainly reinforce these values and the overall best interests of employees and their families.

But it's not so much about the policies in place as it is the way you handle the day-to-day business. A lot of businesses separate their corporate locations from their operations locations — the 'blue-collar' locations from the 'white-collar' locations.

But, in a business founded on family values, it's important for business owners not to lose touch with their roots. It's crucial to remain immersed in their core business and corporate culture and be mindful and cognizant of the day-in and day-out activities of the organization. The further you remove yourself, the more you forget the excitement and fast pace of your business, and the more you put yourself at risk of losing the insatiable passion that brought you into the industry in the first place. As business owners, the bottom line is this: We don't have to be there; we want to be there. <<

STEVEN LETURNO and **DANIEL LISOWSKI** are co-founders of AIT Worldwide Logistics headquartered in Itasca, Ill. Spanning numerous nationwide locations and an ever-increasing network of international partnerships, the global transportation and logistics provider delivers tailored solutions for a wide variety of vertical markets and industries. Reach them at www.aitworldwide.com or (800) 669-4AIT (4248).

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