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- There are no additional resources in step 7y

Training your staff to run your business without you

by Geoff Mutton

A major frustration for most small business owners is not being able to take time off from their business.

It was reported in 2019 that around a quarter of Australia's small business owners had not had a holiday in four years. A small percentage of owners claim they have never taken time off from their business. It seems that many small businesses are regarded by their owners as a 24/7 commitment rather than a job, and there is a widespread belief that the business depends totally on the owner being at the desk or on the tools every day of the year.

This culture is not only unhealthy for business owners, but it points to a reluctance to delegate and organise staff so that an owner can disappear for a few weeks without expecting that the business will crash.

Many owners compensate by just shutting the workshop down over the December break, but that's not doing the right thing by the business.

All it takes is some staff organisation and a bit of training.

If owners begin planning right now, they may be able to take their end of year break, and leave their business still ticking over in the hands of trained staff, who will usually rise to the occasion when given some extra responsibility.

Regardless of how good the holiday plan might be, owners may have to accept that when the leader is removed from any organisation, production and performance may fall.

This does not mean that the staff are doing a bad job. It simply means that removing a critical piece of an organisation can be expected to have an impact.

Here are some skills that will help to minimise any impact that the absence of the owner will have on the business.

Clarify who does what

To enable a workshop to operate successfully, many routine tasks are performed every day. These will be a combination of workshop related tasks and admin/office related tasks.

These tasks will be assigned to the four typically distinct roles in a workshop – the owner, the technician, the service advisor and the person who handles administration. Larger businesses will have one person in each role. In a smaller workshop one person might be responsible for multiple roles.

It is critical that the roles are well documented so that everyone is clear on who does what. This topic was covered in detail in July 2015 (Responsibility schedule). Visit www.tat.net.au/capricorn for templates and a short video that explains how to draw up responsibility schedules.

Assign responsibility

The next step is to allocate who is going to take on the owner's tasks when they are away. If the owner is usually the person who answers the phone, someone has to be assigned to take over this chore. Allocating each of the owner's routine chores to a staff member reduces the risk of confusion, and makes the running of the workshop very clear to everyone.

Perhaps some tasks can wait until the owner returns from holiday. For example ordering stock will have to be done as required while paying a supplier might be something that can be held off until the owner returns.

Appoint a leader

Business owners are usually the decision makers on a daily basis, so somebody needs to be appointed as the team leader who will ultimately have overall responsibility for the business.

Once the leader is selected it is vital to make all staff aware of the appointment. If your choice of leader has the potential to cause friction in the workshop, take the time to sit down privately with all concerned and discuss the reasons for your decision.

Train your staff

Don't expect staff to immediately take on extra or new responsibilities the day you walk out the door on holiday. Take the time to train them. If a technician is going to take on the service advisor role, swap the roles for a week. Better for mistakes to be made while the owner is still around.

Trust your staff

This is the hardest step of all. When it comes to the crunch, many owners just can't let go. They cling to the fear that without them the business will implode.

To overcome this fear, refer back to the point made earlier – just because the staff may not perform as well as the owner, does not mean they aren't doing a great job.

If you follow the simple formula above, you have just one more thing to do – take a leap of faith and trust your staff to do their job. You may be surprised how much responsibility staff will willingly take on when you let them.

Business owners have every right to expect some freedoms, and the first step to freedom is to put in place the procedures that will allow the business to run, whether the owner is there or not.

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn

Just go for it!