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**RETAILING**

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# When the boss isn't there

**AROUND EIGHT MONTHS AGO**, my business partner Shaun and I were asked to meet with a businessman to discuss the possibility of helping his business. The business had an amazingly unique concept that mixed dining and retail within the same floor space, which was delivered in a chic modern setting. We were wined and dined as the owner explained passionately about the quality of the product and the fine details that went into the experience. He believed that his business was ready to be taken to the next level.

We both loved the concept, but there was something amiss. The owner was very much into the image and so passionate about it that he had become controlling. We could sense this through our questioning, and we got a feeling that his business could not expand past the existing several locations because the owner did not know how to transfer his passion onto the employees.

Shaun went back a few weeks ago to have a dinner there with his family. He had 'talked up' the restaurant so much that his family was really excited about eating there. But as they entered they had to prompt a staff member to seat them at a table. It took around five minutes for the menu to arrive, even though the restaurant was only a third full.

Then another 15 minutes passed, at which stage Shaun said that his family was ready to order. The first part of the order came relatively quickly – within 10 minutes, but another 30 minutes passed without the second part of the order arriving. During this time, Shaun, who has in the past managed large retail teams, assessed the behaviour of the staff. Some were shuffling utensils and pretending to clean. Others hung around the bar area chatting and making themselves drinks.

On the retail section two female staff members were chattering behind the counter.

On not receiving the second part of the order, Shaun went to the counter to pay for the food he did receive, and upon walking out did a quick head count – there were more staff than customers on the floor yet the service was really bad. The owner was nowhere in sight, it was probably his day off.

## How do I fix it?

Staff apathy in the boss's absence is a common issue for many retailers, and can't be blamed on being in an industry that pays employees poorly and has a transient labour market. This is a fact of life that has plagued retail and will never go away. But, like your health, prevention is the best cure, and in ensuring that your retail store(s) run like clockwork when you are not there, you need to implement some simple strategies immediately.

**Vision, mission and values** – The business owner was passionate about his unique retail and dining concept. Yet his team did not share the same passion, because they did not live and breathe it everyday. When you write your vision, mission, and values statement, get your team involved in the process of developing these statements, and ensure that you communicate not only by placing a plaque on the wall, but through team meetings which are integrated into employee review sessions.

**Systems and training** – When developing systems, start from the perspective of how the customer is engaged with your business. What do they see? How are they greeted? Where are the staff positioned? How do your staff develop a relationship with the

customer? Far too often, systems are designed to regulate the employee, without thinking about how the customer enjoys the experience. The systems or operations manual is not there to collect dust. Train your team members on all the systems that are relevant to them, and retrain them if they are not adhering to the system.

## Job descriptions and key

**performance indicators** – Have clearly defined job roles for your team members, along with key performance indicators (KPIs) that set out the objectives you want your employees to achieve. Also make your KPIs simple and remove any jargon. They can be simple as: 'Answer the phone within three rings', or 'Sell \$750 worth of product each day'.

Sit down and review your employees' performance on a consistent basis, this follow up mechanism will ensure that you communicate clearly how team members are performing.

**Recruitment and attrition** – Here is a philosophy to live by: if you could recruit 10 superstars in a year, how good would your business be? Recruitment should not be used to fill in the voids, but should be a continuous cycle of finding great talent, and bringing it into your business. Also you should not keep poor performers in your business. Remove them – they will cost you more in lost customers if they stay. ●

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