

How To Be Your Company's Most Valued Employee

By
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If a company wants its brand to stand out from the competition, differentiating it from its competitors is the place to start. Subaru has done this more successfully than most. Its customers give new meaning to brand loyalty. Many are passionate and downright fanatical in their allegiance.

According to Forbes, the Subaru brand has the most loyal customers in the industry, with Forester leading the way.

Subaru customers are quick to say their cars are safer, handle flawlessly in all types of weather, and keep their value far better than other brands. All this flies in the face of what many people view as dated and stodgy styling.

It's the same with anyone who has a job. Differentiation makes the difference if you want to be known as your company's most valuable employee. Getting there is quite simple: figure out what creates value—what sets you apart from others? Here are thoughts about personal differentiation:

1. *Always be ready.* Brand yourself as someone who comes through in the crunch. Be ready to step in. "Carl lost his voice," "Tonya is trapped in traffic," and "Max had a customer emergency." These are daily occurrences—and most people put their head down and try to become invisible. Their first thought is thinking up some lame excuse to avoid getting nailed. *Be the one who's always ready.*

2. *Make sense.* Whether it's in a meeting or in any situation, making sense is essential. That's not easy. Most people automatically think that what makes sense to them will make sense to others. It's both not true, and it can spell trouble. So, before saying anything, ask yourself how this would sound if someone else said it? *Making sense makes a difference.*

3. *Never wing it.* Winging it is all it takes to go down in flames. Sure, your co-workers will say, "Hey, you did great." Don't believe it; you didn't. You probably embarrassed yourself and your company. To wing it is to blow it by saying things we don't mean, are incorrect, and don't make sense.

Here's what to do when you're put on the spot. "Give me three minutes." Then, jot down three main talking points. Add a sentence for an introduction, and one at the end as a close.

4. *Come up with solutions.* “I’ll work on that” are the magic words. Don’t hold back just because you don’t have an instant answer. Not knowing can be an advantage—no baggage. If you work at it, you can find one that’s a good fit, and that gets positive attention.

5. *See situations as they are.* The new sales manager arrives and starts a sales training program he had used elsewhere. It creates negative blowback and flops, all because he failed to take the time to understand and engage the sales team. This cost him needed credibility. The picture in your head always needs to match what’s going in the real world.

6. *Share everything you know.* Even though teams are in, there are still too many “hoarders” in business, those who blatantly play it close to the vest. That’s stupid; there’s nothing to protect since there are no secrets. Be known as one who welcomes opportunities to share their knowledge and experience.

7. *Write it to get it right.* Most business writing is horrible, whether emails, proposals, letters, or memos. Good writing gets attention. To write it right, ask and answer these four questions: 1) Why is this important? 2) What are the obstacles/problems? 3. How can they be overcome? 4. What action is needed?

8. *Repurpose yourself.* It’s quite simple. If others see you today the way you were two, five or more years ago, you’re expendable. Have you learned new skills that help you perform more efficiently? Have you taken on new tasks? How much has your knowledge base grown? What leadership opportunities have you taken? How often have you asked for additional responsibilities?

9. *Develop a niche.* Creating personal value is key and one of the best ways to do it is becoming a specialist in a particular area. Build a reputation so you’re the “go-to person,” the one who has the answers and is always ready to help. Instead of finding leads, you can attract them.

10. *Make presenting a priority.* Here’s why: good presenters are in short supply in every company. Just having a slew of PPT slides leaves listeners cold. But those who do a good job attract the right attention and get opportunities that help move them forward. To hone your presentation skills, raise your hand every chance you get. But be sure you always have a crisp, clear, and compelling message that excites.

11. *Help them get what they need or want.* The biggest mistake people make is failing to recognize that there are no passive positions or “regular” jobs in business. None. Every job—from top to bottom—has one implicit objective that is

never found on a job description. It's recognizing that every action throughout the day has immense value; it helps someone get what they need or want.

12. Keep your antenna up. Many say that what they want most on the job is to be left alone so they can get their work done. That's why they create a mental cocoon as protection from all the "noise" and "interference" that surrounds them. While this is understandable, those who are most valued behave differently; they keep their antenna up. They sense what's happening, catch the nuances, recognize problems, and use this data to rise above the noise and stay focused on their goals.

Why don't more people aspire to be the most valued employee? Why are they content to be something less? When I read the words of Robert Crais in *The Last Detective*, I knew I had found the answer "People want you to be ordinary," wrote Crais. They want us to be like *them*. If that's true, then there are enormous opportunities for the few who strive to be their company's most valued employee.

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