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## How to Get Employees to Play by the Rules

The best way to ensure cooperation is to have rules that make sense.

by Mel Kleiman

Every time I leave for a speaking or training engagement, I take the same route to the airport and, 98% of the time, in the same spot, parked on the same side of the freeway, I pass the same blue and white patrol car. Predictably, every trip, just before I reach that spot, I slow down to the speed limit. When I have passed the officer and am safely out of radar range, I put the pedal to the metal and make the rest of the trip doing about 10 miles per hour over.

I know I am not alone in this behavior. In fact, you can tell where the officer is by the sea of red brake lights just before you reach his position. And you can tell when the majority of drivers think it's alright to go back up to the "normal" over-the-limit speed.

While this kind of "boundary stretching" may work on a freeway, on the job, it's important to enforce the established rules, policies, and procedures that make your store safe, efficient, and profitable.

The best way to ensure cooperation is to have rules that make sense. Even if employees or customers gripe about some of your rules, they will follow and respect them if they understand why they are necessary.

This is why health and safety rules are relatively easy to enforce. Most everyone understands that disobeying these rules can be tragic. (Cranes tip over and workers are killed; dog food is contaminated and family pets die, etc.)



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### Clarify Your Message

If you have a rule that employees or customers regularly break or abuse, ask yourself if you've made it perfectly clear why that rule is important. (And while it may be perfectly obvious to you, you'd be surprised how many people "don't understand" if it has not been clearly spelled out for them.) Bottom line: People normally only balk at rules they don't understand or that you can't logically explain.

Do you have an employee who is chronically late for work? If the person is responsible for store opening, explain the annual dollar loss when just one customer, who couldn't get his morning coffee, permanently takes his business elsewhere a result. If someone is frequently late for a shift, explain the specific impact on the coworkers who have to cover for them. (Susan has to pay her daycare provider overtime, etc.)

If customers disregard your "No shoes, no shirt, no service," sign, give the next shoeless, shirtless guy who comes in a flier explaining that, at times, there can be broken glass or spilled chemicals on the floor and that sometimes customers with hot coffee or food in their hands run into other customers.

Once everyone understands the rules, cooperation will be the norm, but from time-to-time you may still have to play the role of "enforcer."

This doesn't necessarily mean you have to come across as the bad guy. What you want to do is tell the offender what it was he did and ask for his side of the story. Once you've heard him out, explain the reason for the rule and ask him if he now understands. Whether or not the person "gets it," now is the time to state your expectations and describe the consequences should there be a "repeat offense."

Consider too that some of your rules may be like old "blue laws" (most of which prohibited the sale of any kind of merchandise on Sundays). If you find you cannot explain the reason for a rule, it may be time to strike it from the books.

Should you run into an instance of a favored employee or big spending customer who tempts you to allow some boundary stretching in their particular case, remember, when you bend the rules for one, you're telling everyone else it's acceptable behavior.

People are not judged by their words, but by their actions. Explain your rules and enforce them fairly and equally.

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