

CEO Tip December 2013 – Passion, Not Facts

by Guido Quelle

What do the following statements have in common?

- "Next year we want to achieve 7.5% growth."
- "We have to bring the EBITDA back up to the 12% mark!"
- "The return on our capital can't drop below x%!"
- "Our turnover growth has to reach double figures next year – at least 10%!"
- "Next year we're going to push product XY on the market, so that it makes up at least 15% of our turnover!"

First of all: All five statements have measurable targets.

Second: All five are realistic statements from realistic everyday operations.

And third: All five statements are completely unsuitable for even starting to harness the growth energy in your company.

You've heard me say it before and I'll say it again: profitable growth is the result of taking the right actions. Profitable growth isn't a cause; it's an effect. The statements above, which I've often heard used with the intention of motivating staff, are all unsuitable for getting ideas across. The last of the five is probably the "least worst" of all these empty sentences.

Like it or not, as a CEO you have to be in a position to turn the targets and business goals expressed in the lines above into content that your employees can discover and implement for themselves in their respective duties. Quantitative factors are not suitable for creating drive, let alone passion.

Flight attendants from Singapore Airlines will always tell you how proud they are to work for the airline; they may well tell you about the 160 trainings they've done in three months, and they will also tell you that they can only do their job because they love it. They will say that they see their passengers as friends, not as strangers, and that they enjoy accompanying these "friends" for a few hours—and if problems arise, they're happy to solve them. This attitude can't be ordered "from above," it can't be taught and you can't put a number on whether you have this attitude or not. Despite this, are these flight attendants aware of the competition? Of course! Try asking them sometime—you'll be amazed.

Employees at the Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong didn't need any instructions when, recently, a guest asked for a glass of water with ginger and they didn't have any ginger on hand. They immediately sent someone to the market to buy some. This kind of service mentality isn't the result of orders, and profitability isn't an issue here.

What are you doing to help your employees discover a passion for their job, to translate that passion into content and to sustainably shape that content into profitable growth? Guiding your employees could turn out to be the most effective tool in your repertoire.

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