

Interview with Chip Berry

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Adam Wishnowski prepared this paper as an assignment for GMGT 2010. It is being provided as an example of a Writing Assignment #2: Interview. The author does not intend to demonstrate either effective or ineffective managerial practices. Names may have been changed to protect confidentiality. The author maintains full copyright © on this assignment and has granted permission for students of GMGT 2010 to read it for learning purposes.

In Canada, the retail sector makes up the highest proportion of the work force at 11.5% or approximately 1.9 million workers. With this many employees, someone is needed to oversee them, this is where the managers come in. Although one might not consider this to be a glamorous position, managers are essential to keep a business running smoothly. I intend to uncover some of the details of what a manager does and how they operate on a daily basis.

I was lucky enough to interview the Assistant Store Manager at Home Depot, Chip Berry. Berry has been a manager for many years, at various different retail outlets across Canada. He brings a distinctive perspective to the interview because of his experiences; he's been around the world, witnessed many events, and gathered a wide variety of perspectives. He understands the particulars of the retail business and what is needed for success.

Berry chose a career in management to fulfill his passions. He has been involved with charitable groups such as Siloam Mission and the Salvation Army. As Berry puts it “work is one of two things: its either your passion or pays for your passion”. That’s not to say that he doesn’t love his job as a manager as his genuine enthusiasm is on display throughout the interview. It merely provides him a way to support his family while doing his part to help save the world.

Management encompasses many varying aspects of the business. At points you are a teacher, friend, cheerleader, judge, and jury. As an Assistant Manager, it’s hard to pinpoint exactly what tasks the job encompasses. It takes a wide variety of roles that won’t necessarily be seen on a job overview posting. Berry finds that confidence is key, especially when making decisions. He’s not afraid of making a decision and standing by it.

In addition, the hardest aspect of his job is finding a way to motivate and co-ordinate numerous employees towards a common goal. He knows that everyone is motivated by

something, the challenge is finding out what that is. He finds that a laid back approach is key to maintaining employee morale; that's not to say he isn't stern when needed however. Berry lets his employees do the job they were brought in for and wouldn't ask them to do anything that he would not do himself. It's an approach that walks a fine line between being a comrade and a boss.

Without customers, retail stores fail to exist; therefore customer service becomes a paramount concern. Berry describes great customer service as when a customer leaves the store they leave happier or smarter. Ideally the customer will leave the store with what they need, not necessarily what they came in wanting. It's all about how to approach bringing them from one point to the other. The same applies to customer issues. Berry approaches this much like his customer service. The end goal is that when the customer leaves the store, they are better off than when they came in. He appreciates that customers take the time out to express their issues, and provides them with the best solution. He understands that customers are frustrated with the situation, and believes that no matter the issue, it can be overcome. It's all about understanding what the customer wants him to do and finding a way to accomplish that.

With that being said, customer issues aren't the only things that a manager deals with. Managing employee relations such as hiring and critiquing employees is another important aspect of the job.

With respect to hiring, Berry tries to hire those that do not have a background in retail. He believes that this breaks down a barrier of processes that have occurred in other retail environments, while also providing a clean slate to work with. More importantly he emphasizes that employees can be taught how to sell, however they cannot be taught on how to speak to

someone and genuinely enjoy being around people. These personality traits provide the basis for what Berry deems an ideal prospective employee.

On the other hand, there needs to be a method to assess an employee's work along with handling any conflicts that may occur. In analyzing an employee's work, Berry takes a positive and explanatory approach. He starts with celebrating something that an employee does well then proceeding to the behavior that needs changing. If an individual understands why the change needs to be made it becomes easier to buy in to making the change. In his role, there is a need to determine the underlying cause of the frustration in order to resolve the conflict. Berry manages to achieve this through open communication and active listening.

At Home Depot, there are two main objectives that need to be met: sales and the gross margin. Gross margin is the overall profit to the store or the sales that actually make the company money. In his role, Berry indicates there needs to be a balance between these as well as any controllable expenses at the store level. In order to achieve these objectives, there is a necessity to motivate each individual employee to be on the same page. Some are happy with the store reaching sales goals, others are driven to reach individual goals, and some just want to feel involved in the system. Determining which category an individual falls into determines the approach taken. For those that want to feel involved, it can be something as simple as a high five and they will operate at maximum efficiency. For the others, providing the upbeat atmosphere and individual support tends to accomplish the desired effect.

However, when sales targets are not being met, the entire management staff takes an overview as the store as a whole to determine why sales are down. There is a meeting every Monday where departments are reviewed and compared to the previous week and year. Reasons are discussed to determine why business is down in each area. Depending on the issue,

resolutions such as product availability and staffing are discussed and corrective action is taken for the following weeks.

After my interview with Chip Berry, I begun asking myself what my motivation for working in retail was. Is it my passion or is it paying for my passion? I thought about it some more and although I love my job at Home Depot, it's not my passion, it's just a job. However much like Chip, I use it to fund my passion and to further my career. It's how I pay for my University education, my books, and bills. It provides me with the tools I need for success further down the road. Not only has this interview provided me with some insight to what my manager does, but also imparted a better understanding of the things I do at the workplace.

Questionnaire

Career Background

1. What made you choose management as a career?
2. What are the main traits of the Assistant Store Manager position?
 - Of those traits, which do you consider most important and why?
3. What aspect of the job do you find most challenging?
4. Is there a characteristic of the job that isn't commonly known to those outside the company?
5. How would you describe your management style?

Customer Service

6. What is your approach to handling difficult customers?
 - Can you provide an example and explain how you handled it?
7. What do you consider great customer service?
 - How do you implement it daily?

Employee Relations

8. As a manager you are involved in the hiring process. What traits do you value in a prospective employee?
 - Does this differ from what the company values?
9. What strategies do you use to address employee disrespect or conflict?
10. What methods do you use to critique an employee's performance?

Fulfilling Objectives

11. In retail there generally are daily targets that need to be met. What are these targets?

- What is your approach to meeting these goals?
- How do you motivate your employees to achieve these goals?

12. When sales are below target, what strategies or methods do you implement to get them back on target?