

How to be a good employee?

It sounds a strange subject to discuss 'How to be a good employee?'. Ask any employee and you will find that every one of them consider themselves as a good employee. To discover the truth, ask any employer and you will be surprised.

Generally, about 20% of the employees only are considered 'good' by an employer and perhaps about 60% as average. What do you think of the rest? The answer is 'Redundant' which could be due to either 'performance' or a 'negative' attitude.

While most employees do have the intention to be good, they do not end up being one. Since just an intention does not take us any where, it's important to know what it takes to be a good employee from an 'employer's' perspective. Being in the industry for long and having been a part of the design and implementation process of various kinds of appraisal systems, I consider the following as a guideline to what it takes to be a good employee:

1. Performance

Remember that the primary reason why you have been employed is to carry out a set of tasks. Depending on your functional area, this will include both qualitative and quantitative factors on which performance is assessed. You know for what you have been employed and hence it's important you must focus primarily on this area. Because if you are not a performer, then just forget about being a good employee.

Some times, even with your best efforts, your performance may be lagging behind which could be due to either external or internal reasons. The question therefore is 'what should an employee do in such a situation'?

Apart from continuing to try your best, one thing should help you. Be proactive. First, talk to your superiors, share your anxiety about your performance lagging behind and jointly analyze the factors and agree with them on an action plan. Even if your performance doesn't come up to expectations, at least you would have alerted proactively your superiors and thus giving them an opportunity to rework the projections or plans.

Second, we often fail to use our most visible resource. Feel free to use the services of your immediate boss which can be to get important appointments or some joint meetings, if you are in Marketing or some similar steps depending on your functional area. The emphasis today in most organizations is on teamwork and hence you will find most bosses receptive to the idea. If you haven't yet tried this, try it for once.

2. Discipline

All organizations lay great emphasis on discipline and do not hesitate to take serious action on indisciplined employees irrespective of performance. It could be coming to the office on time or

your reports or just following the instructions or guidelines or rules as applicable to you. All guidelines or rules of any organization are developed and fine tuned over a period of time with good reasoning behind.

If you however feel that certain rules are a little oppressive and unreasonable and if you think other employees do share the same view, then depending on the organization culture, you can take it up formally instead of breaking the rules and getting into trouble.

3. Attitude and value systems

Most organizations have the 'Vision' and 'Mission' statements which are described and often displayed to highlight and focus every employee's attention. It's important for you to understand every word of these two statements.

Be a picture of positive attitude in both words and action. You will then be radiating positive vibes around you and this will be noticed by every one. Along with performance and discipline, attitude is the most important factor, which contributes to your being a good employee. If there are issues, which are affecting you like your salary, commissions, benefits or product related issues, do take them up formally instead of gossiping about the problems and spreading the negativity around.

The other important thing to remember and act is according to the value systems of the organization. For example, if an organization lays extreme level of importance on customer satisfaction and you continuously falter on maintaining your customers, then you could soon be under fire. Therefore every employee should understand the value systems of the organization and adopt the same to the extent possible.

4. Initiative

Initiative is an action or set of actions or intention to do something beyond the normal scope of your duties and responsibilities in the interest of the organization. Please remember we are discussing how to be a good employee and hence if you go beyond the normal scope of your job, it is bound to be noticed by your superiors. Your actions would be perceived to be in the interest of the organization and hence the perception of you being a good employee.

To illustrate this further, the following are some examples, which could be perceived as initiatives in most organizations. However, do consider if these are in line with your organizational culture and management style.

- Giving practical suggestions which would help improve efficiency of operations.
- Lending a helping hand in the work of other co employees.
- Bringing to the attention of superiors / management concerns if any of other employee / employees.
- Taking the lead in office functions / picnics / get together etc.

5. Be a good human being

This is not something which is taught in your induction training or during on the job training. To be a good human being is something, which is the result of the value systems, imbibed in you. A natural smile, a courteous behavior, concern for others, sincerity and integrity are some of the traits which

goes a long way in being a good human being. I would emphasize that this is something to be taken seriously by all because ultimately in a broader perspective, it is far more important to be a good human being rather than just a good employee. And if you are a good employee and a good human being too, then you will be considered one of the most valued employees of the organization.

Some Do's and Don'ts

In addition to the above, the following check list might be a useful ready reckoner:

The Do's

1. Be early by 5 to 10 minutes to the office. While almost everyone arrive on time, just by coming few minutes early, you tend to get noticed and immediately stand out from the rest. Never be a habitual latecomer as by doing so again you stand out, but negatively from the rest.
2. Be punctual whether it's completing your work/reports on time or submitting your leave applications or whatever. Report back from leave always as per schedule and on time. If you have to arrive late, ensure this is communicated to your immediate superior.
3. Attend all office meetings and open forums. Learn to communicate tactfully. It's not good to be critical of the management or superiors in public. Instead present your views as feedback appropriately and provide suggestions for improvement. When asked for your opinions, always try and give a balanced opinion, not taking extreme positions.
4. Be self-motivated. It's your job, your career and therefore do not expect someone to be behind you, pushing and motivating you. Instead, be self-motivated and get ahead of the usual obstacles, disappointments, irritations and failures of a job.
5. Be honest and sincere in your dealings with the employer. Similarly with your clients or suppliers or any such third party. Be careful and completely transparent in respect of cash transactions, which cannot be avoided.
6. Be committed and do your work for which you are paid for, even if you find co employees taking things easy at times. In one of the companies for which I worked for, I was rather alarmed once to find sales performance from a group of people continuously dropping. While investigating, I was tipped off that the group used to go and spend time in a coffee shop instead of heading for respective sales territories. When I went to the spot, there was a hilarious scene of the employees running away after seeing me, with their sales kits in different directions. One of them jumped a nearby wall and hurt himself. Not withstanding this, the entire group got sacked the same day.

Remember the saying, "If you do more than what you are paid for, eventually, you will be paid more than what you do".

Some Don'ts

1. Don't procrastinate, which is a common cause of failure. Be organized in your work. Maintain a clutter free workstation and use a daily checklist for things to do instead of depending on your memory.

2. Never violate the general service guidelines for employees. For instance, if your office is a no smoking zone, follow it. Ensure taking minimum number of breaks for smoking. Never come drunk to the office. If you are out for lunch, it's necessary to be back reasonably on time.
3. Never report sick, when you are not. It could be tempting to report sick especially on weekends or week beginnings and after late night parties. I jovially call this as weekend sickness and remember the case of an employee who reported sick on a weekend but was found on the beach a few hours later. I have also come across cases of employees found in the cool comforts of cinema theatres, when they should be working outside the office premise, meeting clients. No employer will tolerate false reporting and if you are spotted, that will get reported.
4. Never misuse the property or resources or information of the organization. Some years back, I had to sack an employee on the spot when it was found he was using the office premise and resources to do freelance design work. Similarly avoid excessive telephone talks whether using office lines or even your personal mobile.
5. Never back answer your superior in public. Never misbehave with superiors or co employees or be extremely loud. If there are issues which make you upset, deal with it preferably in private or tactfully, in public.
6. Never leave your workstation for the day, unless the work for the day is completed or the nature of pending work is considered normal in the organization.

The above is not a comprehensive checklist. However, if you generally follow the above, not only you would be considered valued but more importantly, a model employee.