



By Mac McIntire

Commitment vs. Compliance: Ten Reasons Why You Need Your Workers' Hearts, Not Just Their Hands

There are significant behavioral and performance differences between employees who are fully committed and those who merely are compliant.

Anyone who ever has been a client of mine knows that my *Ladder of Commitment*[®] model is the center-piece of everything I do. I preach, teach and expound about the importance of true commitment in both business and interpersonal relationships. The ability to draw out or instill commitment within one's employees is a management skill every business professional should master.

Not Everyone Agrees

The need for employee commitment was challenged recently in an *Accountability Management Workshop*[™] I was facilitating for a large corporation on the East coast. While discussing the *Ladder of Commitment* one manager struggled over my assertion of the importance of gaining the commitment of employees. He reasoned that as long as the employees accomplish their tasks, perform to standard, and comply with the policies and procedures of the company; it isn't necessary for them to be truly committed.

"As long as an employee does what I want when I want it," the manager said, *"why do I care whether or not he is committed? I don't need his commitment; I just need his compliance."*

A wonderful philosophical debate ensued among the participants over his comment. Some agreed with his view. Those in agreement felt the primary job of a manager is to ensure employees comply, stay within set guidelines and boundaries, and perform the job as expected. As long as the employees do their job to standard and maintain the proper behaviors at work, this group didn't care whether the employees were personally committed or what their inner motivations or attitudes might be. Basically they felt as long as the employees comply by looking like, sounding like, and acting according to the requirements of the job, that is all a manager can hope for from one's employees.

Other managers in the session disagreed. This group felt there is a significant and important difference between commitment and compliance. They believed the only way to achieve superior levels of performance is to go beyond mere compliance. Only committed employees, they said,

will think and act for themselves, doing what is best for the company when there are no rote guidelines or policies to follow. They felt only committed employees think outside-the-box and take the company to the next level.

Why Commitment is Important

After a lengthy discussion with both sides presenting compelling arguments, I had the group take a short break. During the break I quickly made a flipchart of my personal beliefs, or axioms, regarding why I think commitment is more valuable than compliance. Until this discussion I had never enumerated these thoughts before. When the group returned from the break, this is what I told them.

Point One

If employees perform out of compliance, rather than commitment, they do it because they are told to, not because they want to. Compliant employees only do what they are told. Managers who believe in a compliant philosophy would have to enjoy giving orders and hope that employees enjoy taking orders. But I find few managers enjoy giving orders and even fewer employees enjoy taking them.

Compliant, order-taking workers are like animatronic robots that simply go through pre-programmed motions. They are not sentient beings who think and act for themselves. Compliant workers seldom, if ever, take initiative. They rarely are creative and almost never think outside the box. Compliant workers dutifully do what they are told to do; nothing more, nothing less.

The German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said: *"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness."*

Committed employees, on the other hand, seem to see what needs to be done, and they do it no matter what it takes. Because they are committed, they think about their work and come up with new ways to achieve results better, cheaper and faster. Only sentient workers can react favorably to the

ever-changing requirements of the business. Flexibility and agility are critical in today's competitive markets. Compliant workers are almost always rigid and mechanical as they perform their daily tasks.

An African proverb says, "*One volunteer is worth ten forced men.*" I would think that most managers would want workers who willingly step up to the plate; not employees who have to be pushed to perform.

Point Two

If non-thinking employees need managers to think for them -- which is the case if orders have to be given -- then the employees can only act when the manager is around to give orders.

Managers who seek compliant rather than committed workers shouldn't be surprised when their employees go out of compliance when the manager is not around. If external pressure, rather than internal commitment, is the driving force behind the employees' behaviors, then the manager must be present to keep the pressure on the employees in order to ensure their compliance.

Committed employees, on the other hand, keep the pressure on themselves, even when the manager is not around, because they are internally motivated to do so. Committed employees don't wait for orders. They see what needs to be done and they take initiative out of an intrinsic need to do so.

It's been said that "*two heads are better than one.*" If that's the case, and the manager is only interested in non-thinking compliant employees, then the manager's head is the only one doing the thinking for the business. That means the manager has to be smarter than all of the other heads in the company combined. And somehow, I just don't think that's possible.

The whole purpose of managing is to wean employees from their reliance upon management. I want workers to think and act for themselves. I want the motivation of employees to come from within. I want employees to be driven internally, not externally. I want employees who perform for the right reasons, not just because someone told them to. The problem with compliant workers is that when there is no one there to tell them what to do, compliant workers usually go out of compliance.

Point Three

If managers only need compliance from their employees, there is no need for them to create a productive work environment or a quality work life. If employee compliance is all that a manager wants, then all a manager must do to

motivate people is either reward workers well or punish them severely to ensure their compliance. Reward and punishment are the only managerial practices that will have any effect on employee compliance. Compliant workers require either a carrot or a stick to keep them moving. Committed employees, however, require neither of these external stimuli to keep them going.

Rewarding and punishing employees is a very small part of what a manager does. The primary role of a manager is to provide a supportive work environment where employees *could* excel if they *wanted* to. I discovered a long time ago in my own company that getting productive ideas from employees is not so much a matter of having creative employees as it is one of having supportive management. The more supportive I am of my people and the more I let them go (rather than tell them what to do), the better they perform.

Managers who fail to provide a supportive work environment often limit the output of their employees by their neglect. A manager can get a whole lot more from one's employees by being supportive than by offering workers a carrot or a stick. In my opinion, managers who don't get this concept don't understand their role as a manager.

Point Four

Employees who are not committed to something, who toil merely out of compliance, have to fake the behaviors they exhibit at work.

Managers who force their employees to comply with customer service standards of friendliness will find customers are seldom fooled by pseudo-customer service. Customers can sense if someone truly believes or feels something within them. People can tell whether someone is genuine in their service or merely complying to keep one's job. Those who serve out of compliance do so unwillingly, and begrudged behavior is easily detected.

Point Five

It is difficult to be positive and enthusiastic about something for which one does not feel or believe.

Employees who are not committed to customer service, who only serve because they have to, will find it extremely difficult to fake being positive or enthusiastic toward the customers. Fakers seldom are as convincing as those who are genuine.

Point Six

Employees can't fake it forever. If it isn't in them, it isn't in them. Eventually they will tire of

the act and end it. Compliant workers can never stick with bogus behaviors for the long haul. Only committed workers – those who have it within them – can maintain the proper attitude and behaviors over time. Eventually the compliant workers will tire of the façade and stop performing at the expected level.

The best employees are those who “get it” in their head, their heart, and in their gut. I want workers who understand and agree with the business imperative, not just those who placate or acquiesce to it. When people get it in their head, heart and gut, right actions invariably and naturally follow. They do the right things because it is natural for them to do so.

When employees are not committed to something – such as quality or customer service – they behave unnaturally, and only do it because they are forced to do so. They have to *act* committed, instead of being committed. But people can’t behave unnaturally or fake correct behaviors forever. If quality customer service, or whatever you expect from your employees, isn’t in your workers’ heads, their hearts, and their guts, it isn’t *in* them.

Other people can sense when your employees are insincere or incongruent. They can tell when your employees believe in something or not. Customers can tell when your workers are merely complying with a customer service directive. And they can tell when your employees are fully committed to it. Customers are seldom fooled by faked behavior.

Point Seven

When a person is committed to something in his head, heart and gut, certain behaviors and actions naturally follow. When the workers’ actions do not come from the head, heart and gut, but rather from unnatural compliance, employees must constantly and consciously think about their actions. They must try to figure out how to act, since the right actions are not natural to them. Compliant employees are behaving unnaturally throughout the work day, which can be very difficult and extremely stressful. Workers who must work hard just trying to figure out how to act, spend less time actually working. Committed workers, working from their hearts, do that which comes easily and naturally. They do the right things because the right things are naturally right to them.

Point Eight

People cannot motivate others if they are not motivated themselves. Employees cannot

convert others if they are not converted themselves. Therefore, compliant employees cannot have a positive influence performance-wise on other employees in any sincere or significant way.

Compliant workers seldom are cheerleaders for the company. Compliant workers rarely seek to help others, tending to focus only on their own minimum level of compliance. Compliant individuals rarely try to raise the productive output of the group.

Committed employees, on the other hand, out of their own intrinsic enthusiasm, invariably try to convert others to their positive way of thinking. Committed employees typically seek to better themselves and those around them. Committed employees raise their performance because they *want* to perform well. And they want others to perform equally well too. Committed employees strive to improve themselves and others.

Point Nine

It is difficult to have trust, respect or confidence in someone who only complies out of a requirement to do so. Since compliance is an act; it is an act of hypocrisy. Compliant workers are not honest. They are not true to their own feelings and beliefs. They are acting out of compliance, not out of sincerity. Since they are not true to themselves – and therefore not honest – they cannot be trusted or respected. And since they cannot be trusted or respected, they cannot be supported. This is the real reason why compliance-seeking managers tend to harbor the belief that employees cannot be trusted. It also is why these same managers are often accused of, and actually guilty of, not being supportive of their workers.

Point Ten

Finally, **any manager who is interested only in the compliance of his or her employees, rather than their commitment, obviously does not fully understand one’s role as a manager.** A manager’s role is to improve the productive output of his or her employees by increasing the value and worth of their accomplishments. True value and true worth are achieved when employees reach their fullest potential. An employee’s potential is often far beyond the maximum level of compliance with a manager’s dictated job requirements. Compliant workers rarely go beyond the performance expectations set by the manager; while committed employees often astonish management with their ability to far exceed the manager’s expectations.

Managers who elicit the full commitment of their employees get far greater output from their workers because the employees do the right things for the right reasons. They do it because they want to, not because they have to. Employees who are committed to something in their heart, their head, and their gut, far out perform workers who only comply out of fear of punishment or promise of reward. §

Innovative Management Group has been helping companies create a highly committed workforce for over twenty years. Our patented *Ladder of Commitment*[®] model explains the process people go through before they will commit to an organization, individual or course of action. We provide training sessions that teach managers how to gain the commitment of their employees through effective management practices. We show you how to create supportive policies, procedures, processes and practices that ensures you get the highest productive output from your employees.

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