

# SMART BUSINESS

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## BROWARD/PALM BEACH

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## Fast Lane

### Giving employees a voice

How to make sure you're really hearing your workers

By Meredyth McKenzie



**Ed Pozzuoli**  
president, Tripp Scott PA

Even with a slew of daily tasks, **Ed Pozzuoli** still takes time to listen to his employees. Keeping his ears open allows the president of **Tripp Scott PA** — a law firm that posted 2007 revenue of \$20 million — to learn what's going on with his 100 employees and to better understand what matters to them.

"It is important if we understand ... if an assistant has an elderly parent at home or young kids or a particular stress with respect to finances or otherwise, at least have an understanding of where they are in their personal lives, because everyone has a little bit of difference," he says.

*Smart Business* spoke with Pozzuoli about how to listen to your employees and clients to create trusting relationships with them.

#### **Q. How do you develop trusting relationships with employees?**

Being consistent and having an open ear as to what's important to them. When I mean consistent, that the decision-making process — whether it affects them directly or indirectly — is based upon a consistent set of principles, that it's based upon the driving issues ... that you're always looking out for the best interest of the firm ... and, in turn, having them understand that the best interest of the firm is consistent with theirs.

The second thing is understanding what's important to employees, and that main issue is listening. People have a great capacity to understand if you take the time and explain to them. People will understand if you provide enough information for them to participate in and have some input and an understanding of what's important.

It starts with having a truly open door. You have to be secure enough to be open to other's opinions. It's understanding and getting to know family and personal goals and impacts on their personal life.

**Q. How do you get to know your employees' needs?**

When you work together as a team, there's a personal trust that is developed, and you get to understand and know about their spouses, their kids, what's going on at some level ... and they get to know you.

You've got to first make the conscious effort to care about what's going on, and that takes some time. There has to be a mindset that this is our team, what affects them at least indirectly affects you. Look for opportunities to talk them through it and what they think of situations dealing with clients and how they act and how they interact with clients.

People have all kinds of issues, ranging from personal to professional. It's important to understand their needs while keeping it professional.

**Q. How do you create trusting relationships with your clients?**

At the end of the day, it is about fairly assessing what the client's overall goals are, which means you need to understand what those goals are, not just in the particular matter or transactions before you, but knowing what's important to the client and working with the client to achieve those overall goals.

It's asking, simply communicating with them, not just what they say but what they do and how they do it and what their actions are. It's some level of track record, how they run their business.

Create environments in which you see and spend time with clients under different scenarios. Every time you meet with a client, if it's just in an office setting when you're in a suit and tie that's one thing, but if possible, broaden those out so that you get to see different sides of the client. Make sure that you go to the client's place of business and understand the environment in which he or she works. Understand the underlying goals of the business and the industry of that business.

Communicate what you can as clearly as you can. Be consistent about what's important, and at the very least, while you may not be able to do everything your clients or employees want, at least give them an opportunity to be clear about what's important to them and take what's important into consideration.

You have to provide quality work, it has to be cost-effective at some level, but at the end of the day, a relationship with a client or an employee is something that you earn over time.

**Q. How do you remain consistent?**

Having clear, defined principles that guide decisions. So regardless of the decision of the day, if you've projected the right goals and through other decisions that you've made, people get a track record of how and what's important to you and how you analyze those decisions.

There must be a level of integrity in the way you deal with employees, some level of transparency where appropriate, and understanding on their part that you're always looking out for the best interest.

Saying it over and over again, having those goals enunciated and everybody sign off on them, and understanding that this is what's important. Having employees take part in developing the principles is key. This means making sure that we're guided by principles that people agree upon ... and then getting their buy-in.