

Case Study – At The Car Wash

Practice Sample

A person worked at two car washes during the summer in a small city and operated by different owners. What problems are generated in the first scenario. What impact does it have on the organization, its customers, management and employees? In the second scenario, what benefits avail themselves to the organization, customer, management, and employees? What other ways can the issues be addressed?

In the first, the dripping vehicle would come off the rinse line, where four teenagers waited with towels to wipe it dry. When the wipers were finished, they signaled the car owner by leaving the car door standing open. The car owner would generally walk past a pot placed in his or her path with a sign that read “TIPS, THANK YOU”, climb into the car, and drive away with the windows still wet and water streaming from some parts of the car. Occasionally, one of the wipers dropped a wet towel on the ground, only to pick it up and continue wiping. One customer complained to the manager that the wet towel could pick up sand from the pavement and scratch the car. Only a few small coins got into the pot. Turnover of wipers was high, and they expressed hostile attitudes toward management.

The second car wash was opened by a vigorous, enthusiastic young owner. A system was established whereby each customer paid for the service when entering the wash. A ticket was handed to the customer (a practice not followed at the first car wash), which was to be given to the final wiper when the car was dry. The car coming off the rinse line was received by four teenage wipers, three of whom would go on to another car after doing the initial work, while the fourth did the final wiping. This individual did all possible to please the customer because the customer was not inclined to give the ticket to the wiper until the work was done to his or her satisfaction. The customers usually stood beside the wiper pointing out places where more drying was needed. While doing this, the customer was generally seen to take change out of pocket or purse and wait for the wiper to ask for the ticket. Tips were generous and customers drove away in well-dried cars. The manager often got the entire work crew together for pep talks that ran something like this:

We're the best car wash on the coast. We do the best work, have the most satisfied customers, have the happiest workers, and hopefully make the most money of any car wash of equal size. Your tips will be good if you do a perfect job. I've set up 10 customer chairs alongside the wiping area. This is your audience. Show them how well you can do. When you finish, give your customer a guided tour of the car and ask if everything is all right. With this treatment, your customer standing there waiting to give you the ticket will develop the expectation that you should have a good tip. The “audience” on the sideline will see you get tipped. The audience will also tell other people what a great job we do here.

The owner's practices also included job rotation so workers did all jobs (all got a share of the wiper jobs so they would get tipped), flexibility in choosing work hours, and (on weekends) bonuses if a certain volume was reached. The car wash prospered.

What basic concepts and approaches to motivation can be applied to this case?