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“Freedom is the opportunity to make decisions...” - unknown

People like to ask me how we ‘lock’ our customers or employees in.

Personally, I don’t really believe that we can keep anyone with us forever.

Instead, I think we should ask a new question – how can we ‘unlock’ our customers and employees?

Let’s start with the customers.

As we all know, competition gives customers more choices to choose from. With all types of media channels today, customers can keep themselves updated and informed of new products and services – around the clock. So it is extremely difficult to create so-called customer loyalty under current business world.

But I still believe in one thing – everyone should have the right to think, decide and choose what is best for them. Therefore, the best way to ‘pull’ them in is to ‘let’ them choose and make their own decision.

As long as we try to be the good ‘choice’, chances are high that they will choose us. However, it’s impossible to say whether they will stay with us for always. At the end of the day, the customers have the rights to move to other service providers if they get services that better meet their needs.

What we can do and must do it best is never stop improving ourselves every single day. We must make sure that our services are catered to the customers’ changing needs.

The same concept applies to loyalty among employees.

I don’t think employees of today’s generation will be easily satisfied with high salary and big bonus alone. This is particularly true for talented people – the scarce resource that any company would love to have. To attract these talents, we need more than a nice package. We have to offer them a forum to showcase their skills and develop their potentials to the maximum.

Over the past two years, I have been heavily involved in the company’s people development. One of my key jobs today is to interview potential job candidates (middle management up, mostly). What I found is that these young talents are very dynamic and looking for new opportunities and new challenges all the time. In the past, we typically asked job candidates how they planned to use their knowledge to develop the company. Now, I think we have to ask ourselves first how we can help them develop their knowledge and skills.

Since talents are footloose, we need to create a culture which lets them do what they have passion for. We need to ‘unlock’ them from tedious, boring rules and orders. Let them roam freely and be themselves. Let them feel that they are a part of something big. Importantly, continue to assign them to new, challenging projects so they can learn and grow.

However, despite all these, it doesn't guarantee that these people will not want to explore new experiences elsewhere. I remember that we used to lose a couple of good hands late last year. I was sorry for the loss but never thought of asking them to stay. I didn't want to pull them back. What I told them was that I was happy for them to do what they thought was best for their future. But please remember that the door was always open if they wanted to come back.

And they did come back.

Like I said earlier, people must have the rights to make their own choice. If it was a wrong choice, just change it. Nothing to be ashamed of, really!