

Retail Loss Prevention - The Importance of Employee Awareness

One of the most critical components of a successful Retail Loss Prevention (RLP) program is the ability to gain the full support of your employees in carrying out the company's loss prevention strategy. Technology certainly plays an increasingly central role in RLP, but without the active involvement, indeed, a broad "buy in" of every employee in controlling loss and maintaining safety, no RLP strategy will succeed.

So how do you forge a knowledgeable and engaged workforce that will understand, comply with and execute the agreed-on RLP strategy? One way is through an effective awareness program.



Elements of an Effective Employee Awareness Program

- 1) Employees must be educated on the purpose of what you want them to do. It is important to explain the "why". This enables employees to understand your objectives, not just the expectations. For example, if employees understand that external theft can impact them personally in terms of reduced hours, smaller bonuses and smaller pay increases, they are likely to be more motivated to do what they can to prevent it. The awareness program then revolves around the tactics they can use to better prevent external theft, i.e., customer service, placement of high theft merchandise where it is more visible, electronic article surveillance (EAS) tagging of high value product, etc. These action help you achieve your objective of reducing external theft. If done well, every employee will be protecting the store's merchandise from theft, not just the Store Manager or its designated LP team.
- 2) The awareness program that you formulate needs to resonate with your employees. It should be something that enables them to remember the specific elements, motivations, as well as the expectations you have of them. For example, a "catchphrase" that represents your strategy, such as, "Every Unit Counts". This phrase can be customized to fit your strategy. "Every Unit" could refer to protecting each piece of merchandise from theft or damage. "Counts" lets the employee know that each piece that is protected makes a difference, not only for your bottom line, but for her/his bottom line as well. It is critical to explain "why" it is important to protect "Every Unit".

The second focus of your awareness program should be on the "how". Here, you can develop a symbolic, fictitious, amusing character; for example, a "Shortage Shark". The "Shortage Shark" hunts for shortages. This character becomes the symbol for your approach to reducing shortages.

The catchphrase and/or symbolic character should be included with all of your communications with the employees regarding controlling loss and keeping people safe. These catchphrases and/or characters should be developed in coordination with your internal marketing team to ensure that they are consistent with the overall company culture and its communication strategy.

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- 3) The last task is bringing the awareness program to life. There are numerous ways to do this. Posters, videos, physical items like pens or notebooks with your catchphrase and/or character on them, etc. It is important to find multiple ways to communicate because employees respond differently to different stimuli: some like written material, others respond best to frontal presentations in a training room environment; still others are motivated best by online learning materials and others like to watch videos.

The best approach is to leverage as many of these tools as possible, simultaneously. The idea is to “prime” the employees with multiple sources, and with substantial frequency (since priming is a short-term stimuli). In a store or distribution/fulfillment environment, posters are very common. Make sure that Loss Prevention messages are included with the company’s poster program, but never limit yourself to a single source of awareness raising.

Another highly effective awareness platform is video. Everyone watches videos; They engages both the vision and hearing senses simultaneously. People watch YouTube, news and sports videos on their internet devices as a matter of routine; they share videos with each other, they post videos on Facebook, etc. Create a series of short loss prevention videos segments, each one focusing on a specific element or tactic. These videos should include your catchphrase and/or symbolic character. Again, this is where you partner with your internal marketing team to create videos that are consistent with the company’s messaging.

One benefit of creating these videos is, that once made, they are always available. For example, if you have a monthly topic and create a video each month on that topic, you will soon have a library of video segments that can be accessed and shown anytime. In the retail world’s high employee turnover, new employees can access multiple videos at once and develop rapid awareness. This brings them up to speed with your LP topics quickly instead of just seeing the videos on the monthly cycle. In addition, in a certain month you may have a specific concern or situation, such as a hurricane, and you may want to have all employees re-watch a certain video you had already made on what to do in a weather emergency. The one-time investment in each video should result in long term, multiple returns.

Awareness programs can be developed largely in-house or in partnership with an outside vendor. However, whatever process you choose, make the program fit your company’s needs and culture. Employees respond better to something that speaks to their specific needs and concerns.

An effective awareness program is an essential component of a successful LP program. Utilizing video which includes a catchphrase and/or a symbolic character can be the cornerstone to that effectiveness.

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