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ENSURE EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

Recently, I read an article addressing motivational issues and the disconnect that sometimes happens between managers and employees, as well as possible solutions to the problem. "Why your employees are losing motivation," by Sirota, Mischkind and Meltzer, was published in the April 2006 issue of the Harvard Management Update. Not surprisingly, motivational issues cause problems with productivity and trust.

The article emphasizes that employers must understand the importance of certain practices to ensure high motivation and commitment from employees. Those practices are instilling an inspiring purpose, providing recognition, coaching employees for improvement, building camaraderie, finding solutions and facing poor performance. The authors' research found about 85 percent of employees' morale sharply decreases after the first six months at a new company and continues to decline thereafter. To reverse this trend, management must fulfill three areas most employees want:

- Achievement – to be proud of one's job, accomplishments and employer.
- Equity – to be respected and treated fairly in pay, benefits and job security.
- Camaraderie – to have good, productive relationships with fellow employees.

The following practices have been proven to maintain employee motivation and morale and will help employers fulfill the three aforementioned areas.

INSTALL AN INSPIRING PURPOSE

A critical condition for employee enthusiasm is a clear, credible and inspiring organizational purpose summed up in a mission statement, which, if properly conceived, is a powerful tool. Equally important is a manager's ability to explain

and communicate the reason behind the mission to subordinates. The mission statement explains what's important to the organization and its values.

PROVIDE RECOGNITION

All accomplishments must be recognized by managers, even if an employee is performing tasks he's paid to do, because everyone appreciates a compliment. Recognition reinforces accomplishments and ensures there will be more of them. A few ways a manager can acknowledge an employee's positive actions include encouragement, praise in front of others and schedule flexibility. This is one of the most difficult practices for managers to follow, especially if employees are doing the things they're paid to do. Nonetheless, it's a necessary practice of good employee management.

COACH FOR IMPROVEMENT

An employee whose performance is satisfactory should be made aware of it. It's easier for employees to accept coaching when they know management is pleased with their efforts, and management is helping better them. Managers need to remember the importance of providing feedback in a timely manner. Managers should record and monitor employees' satisfactory and unsatisfactory actions and use the information in performance reviews, where they can evaluate actions and review the position's expectations.

BUILD CAMARADERIE

Teamwork heightens motivation. Research shows work also quality increases when employees work in teams. Whenever possible, managers should organize employees into self-managed teams. This typically reduces costs and time. How-

ever, managers should be clear about a team's role, how it operates and management's expectations. Most employees prefer to work with their coworkers. This isn't true in all situations, but if managed properly, teams can serve as a great way for employees to build camaraderie and bond with one another.

FIND SOLUTIONS

Employees are a rich source of information about how to do a job and how to do it better. This principle has been demonstrated with many different employees, from hourly workers doing the most routine tasks to high-ranking professionals. The best managers find opportunities to have direct conversations with individuals and give employees freedom to operate and make changes on their own, with their knowledge and experience. The keys are to get through negative talk and to have employees focus on solutions to the problems they face. Many times managers understand how difficult a problem or project can be because they've been there themselves. All of us have and will continue to face problems and focus on the solutions that move us forward.

FACE POOR PERFORMANCE

Managers should identify and deal decisively with employees who don't want to work. Doing this will raise the morale and performance of other employees, who will understand an obstacle to their performance has been removed. Managers owe it to employees to tell them if their performance is unsatisfactory and why, and should give examples. If managers are unfair or inconsistent with employees, good performers get nervous and upset and will likely leave the organization. The best-performing employees need to see an effort being made to correct poor performers. Otherwise, they'll lose respect for managers. **GC**