

KEEPING THEM HAPPY

Keep your employees' morale high during peaks, valleys and trying times of the year using 'carrots,' motivation and psychology.

by Ed Wandtke

Most companies welcome the nice weather, which brings with it the first of many busy periods of the year. But few managers look forward to the high stress levels associated with these times.

Depending on the location of your company in the different climatic zones, these periods of favorable weather can last from two months to much longer.

What can you do when employees are asked to work extended hours for weeks on end? How do you deal with the issue of no summer vacations? What can you do to encourage your employees to make additional sales when the prime sales season is over? When the temperature reaches 100 degrees for several weeks in a row, how do you motivate the workforce?

Morale boosting

Morale is one of the key ingredients to the success of most lawn service industry companies. It is the thread of cohesiveness that holds a company together year-round, through varied conditions. It is therefore important for the owner of the company to pay attention to conditions in the market that may cause a change in company morale.

Are you seeing competitive pressure, causing you to lose customers? Have you experienced faster than usual growth this spring, causing you to promote someone faster than anticipated?

Any of these conditions can affect the morale of your employees. Now is the time to get your feelers out and determine how the employees are feeling about the company. Don't ask supervisors about employee morale. Get input from the troops and determine their condition for yourself.

Once you know the current company morale, then look to the future. Determine what action may need to be taken to improve the performance of your employees and increase the probability of achieving your annual company goals.

Creating incentives

Using incentives to encourage em-

ployees is a way to reward employees for making an extra effort. But if the reward is merely for enduring the weather elements or for working an extended period of overtime, you are not employing the right incentive system.

Instead, you need to determine how you can better use part-time personnel to provide your employees a shorter work week, or develop a plan to give production personnel additional time off during the hot summer season.

Time is frequently the most valuable benefit that can be provided to these individuals. Do not overlook this benefit in lieu of heavy hourly production pressure or extremely trying working conditions. Stay tuned to the condition of your employees during high stress times and you will learn when the entire workforce needs a break.

Motivation

Using incentives to motivate means that you create plans that appeal to the needs and desires of your employees. For most employees, short-term incentive plans work because they

last less than 30 days. In addition, it's a quick payoff. That pumps up the individuals for having done the extra that earned the incentive.

Payoffs can be either cash or non-cash. I have found that service personnel seek cash payoffs most often. But if you have a workforce that treasures other types of rewards, develop a plan to deliver the rewards the employees want most. The success of most incentive plans lies in allowing all employees to win and offers rewards that all of the employees are seeking.

Stroking egos

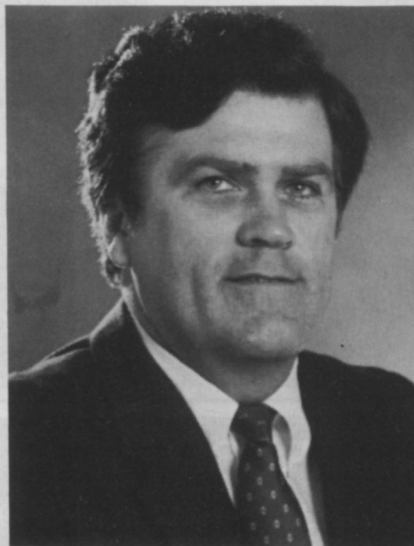
Judicious use of no Saturday work and "flex" schedules that allow four 10-hour days are methods of offering employees options that will serve to keep their morale up. Dealing with the many egos in any company requires that you engage in constant communication with your employees about how they feel about their job. In addition it is important for you to know what motivates each of your employees. Keep track of the individual needs of your employees and keep pushing their personal reward button.

The art of growing a company requires that you manage your company differently from others in the industry so that your employees enjoy working for your company.

Keeping your employees excited about working for your company means you must constantly monitor employee morale. It is not adequate to merely manage production and assume that your employees are excited about having a job.

As the minimum wage continues to increase, only those companies that attend to the needs of their employees will maintain a stable workforce. We have seen many companies increase productivity and customer loyalty because they paid attention to their employees. This effort is hard and requires that you attend to knowing the morale of your company year round.

The payoff in increased profitability and lower employee turnover will be worth it. **LM**



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