

Seven sure-fire ways to motivate workers

If number one on your list is a swift kick in the seat of the pants, you've got a lot to learn.

by Phillip M. Perry

■ Imagine the benefits of a crew that goes that extra mile for your team. Better employee attitudes lead to superior work habits, happier customers and fatter profits or a more efficient team.

And the alternative? An unmotivated, lethargic staff that irritates customers... disenchanted workers who leave for greener pastures...and you, scrambling to hire and train replacements.

"Top managers realize that in a tight labor market, it's cheaper to concentrate on retention than to live with high turnover," says Don Schackne, president of Personnel Management and Administration Associates in Delaware, Ohio. "When an employee walks out the back door, you lose all your invested training dollars and productivity. Starting over is very expensive and creates morale problems."

Is the secret to boost salaries? Not in the long run. "You may steal a few employees from the competition that way, but you can raise your cost of doing business to a level that cannot be passed on to your customers," Schackne notes.

Here is the secret of motivation: show employees how you can increase their skills and move them forward on their career path.

Effective personnel management helps workers achieve their maximum abilities, resiliently and independently, says Dr. Peter A. Spevak, director for the Center for Applied Motivation in Rockville, Md.

Here are some steps you can think about implementing. All will not fit your situation, so select the ones that seem most appropriate...then go to work!

1) Relate individual goals to those of your entire team.

Do your employees feel as though they are vital elements in the success of the team? If not, you're in trouble.

Share financial information with them—sales figures, if applicable, and

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The steps:

- Relate individual goals to company team goals.
- Provide individual feedback.
- Provide career counseling.
- Teach each employee what everybody else does.
- Involve employees in the planning process.
- Encourage them to motivate each other.
- Try new techniques.

budgets—and tell them how they contribute to the team's financial well-being. Then, show them how even greater efficiency will lead to greater salaries and bonuses. Describe your financial plans to share the benefits of increased efficiency.

This two-step effort helps employees identify individual goals and rewards with the greater good in mind, a much better approach than telling them that simply serving the customer is the prime goal.

2) Provide individual feedback.

Once employees have a solid understanding of the team's goal, make sure each one understands how individual tasks help the team.

Your employees need more than a sense that they will be rewarded with higher pay. They also need to know that their work is worthwhile; that it creates value.

Establish a regular program of providing performance feedback to each employee. Keep an eye open for on-the-job excellence. Then issue the appropriate praise.

When praising employees: be specific and provide the feedback in a structured format. Invite each employee into your office on a regular basis and discuss what you thought were especially noteworthy accomplishments. This motivates more than will spontaneous expressions of appreciation at the work site.

3) Provide career counseling.

In individual meetings, communicate to your employees that you are concerned with their long-term career goals, and that what they do today will help them achieve their aspirations tomorrow.

Ask how you can provide them with more opportunities for advancement. Encourage them to suggest ways to further their skills—while helping the team. For instance, can their work be done more efficiently or more productively, or can some tasks be delegated to newer employees?

Also encourage continuing education, which will require a budget.

4) Teach each employee what everybody else does.

Only by knowing the "big picture" will the employee realize how his or her individual actions fit in.

5) Involve your employees in the planning process.

"With the tighter labor market, employers are starting to realize that they better listen to their employees," says Schackne. "How do they feel about the place? The management style?"

Take written surveys, hold regular staff meetings, and establish a goal-setting process, but don't set too many goals and schedule enough time to achieve the goals.

6) Involve your employees in motivating their co-workers.

Ask employees how to motivate everyone else. Speak with each one individually, and as a part of a group discussion.

7) Experiment!

Don't get caught in a rut. Always be on the lookout for new techniques that will get employees working with you to create a valuable team that out-performs any other team around.

Some recent innovations to motivate employees: flexible work hours, suggestion boxes and an awards program.

Remember, too, that incentives are good motivating tools, but they aren't miracle workers, and they have to be structured carefully and correctly. Awards should be items (usually \$10 to \$100 gifts) that employees would not normally purchase on their own.

Above all, gear everything toward encouraging employees to create their own incentives. If they feel they are going somewhere, you won't have to push them.

—The author is a freelance writer based in New York City. More than 3,000 of his articles have appeared in the business press.