

Productivity stems from motivation

by Jonathan Goldhill

It used to be that employees were considered merely tools in company sales and production. However, business owners and managers have realized that by recognizing and nurturing employees, a company can expand and become more productive. This change in mindset is a result of a great deal of research that began many years ago.

One of the first studies done about employees' needs was conducted by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943. According to Maslow, employees have five levels of needs: physiological, safety, social, ego and self-actualizing. Maslow reported that lower-level needs must be satisfied before higher-level needs can be met. When all are met, according to Maslow, an employee is motivated and contributes more to an organization.

A recent study conducted by James R. Lindner, a researcher at Ohio State University, Columbus, found that employee motivation is based on the following:

1. Interesting work
2. Good wages
3. Appreciation for work done
4. Job security
5. Good working conditions
6. Promotions and growth
7. Feeling included
8. Employer loyalty to employees
9. Tactful discipline
10. Sympathetic help with personal problems from employers

I have found that effective team management and motivation is a work in progress. However, there are a number of key factors that are important to remember when you are trying to motivate employees.

Caution with criticism

Validation is important. When you recognize an employee's best traits, the employee is likely to use those traits more frequently. By focusing on criticism, you usually will get more negativity. If employees recognize you see the best in them, they will give you more of their best.

It also is important never to embarrass an employee by reprimanding the employee in front of others. Such tactics will only make you look insensitive. When needed, reprimanding should be done constructively and privately.

In addition, avoid talking down to employees or intimidating them to do their jobs. Managers who act like dictators rarely get the best from their employees. An employee who feels threatened often spends more time thinking about job security than focusing on work. And fear breeds resentment—you're not going to get the best work from an employee who spends a lot of time angry at you.

Respect is key

One of the most essential factors in employee motivation is letting employees know they matter. By establishing a mutually respectful relationship with employees, you can establish yourself as someone to work with, not against.

Let employees know they can speak openly with you about ideas or problems. Being open to suggestions about improving employees' positions or growing your company can help your employees take greater ownership of their positions.

Part of respecting employees stems

from getting to know them. One of the most effective keys to motivating employees is finding out what motivates them individually by asking them, listening to their answers and observing them.


Also, there is a lot of value in creating team incentives. By establishing a bonus or profit-sharing plan for employees, they will know when the company is doing well, and they will benefit, as well. Consider end-of-the-year bonuses based on overall annual profits. This will make it clear to employees that by contributing to the greater good of the company, they benefit on an individual level, as well.

Boost morale

There is nothing wrong with letting employees laugh and make small talk, provided the exchange is never excessive and deadlines are being met. Laughter and knowing one another better creates an important bond between employees.

Studies consistently have shown that employees who like and bond with one another call in sick less and are more productive because of their emotional ties to their teams.

Inspire motivation

An effective manager is able to inspire the best in employees. You shouldn't have to force employees to do anything—they should complete tasks because they are motivated. Remember, motivated employees take greater ownership of their positions, ultimately bringing greater value to your company. 

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