

How to Motivate Employees to Take More Ownership

Workers Have Needs That Need to Be Met

As the old saying goes: "People work for a paycheck but will die for a cause." So why don't more managers realize one key to building a sustainable business is rooted in validating your employees?

In the pre-war industrial economy, employees were considered just a part in the production of products and services. Over time the way owners of companies and managers thought about their employees started to change. It was realized that by recognizing and nurturing the needs of employees, a company could grow much more quickly. This change was due in part to a great deal of research on the behavioral needs of employees that began many years ago.

One of the first research studies ever done on employees was 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 had to be satisfied before the higher level needs could be met. When all were met, you then had an employee that was motivated and contributing to the organization.

A study carried out by Researcher James R. Lindner at Ohio State University in 1998 found that employees were motivated by: (a) interesting work, (b) good wages, (c) full appreciation of work done, (d) job security, (e) good working conditions, (f) promotions and growth in the organization, (g) feeling of being in on things, (h) personal loyalty to employees, (i) tactful discipline, and (j) sympathetic help with personal problems.

As for myself, I've spent the past two

decades doing my own kind of personal research. I've studied by trial and error what it takes to build and maintain strong teams. I have come to realize that effective management is an art that you can always learn more about and never truly perfect. I still continue to learn and I'm happy to share what I've come to know so far.

Help an employee see the best in themselves and they'll give you the best

I understood early on that validation was a key factor in motivating and managing people. By giving praise to an employee's unique abilities, I found that they were more likely to exhibit more of the behavior I praised. I knew by focusing on criticism, I would only get more of what I did not want from that employee. I criticized them less and praised them more and always got more of what I needed them to be. They knew I saw only the best in them, and so they aspired to give more of the best.

Two wrongs never make right

Never embarrass an employee by reprimanding them in front of the rest of the team. Don't publicly single out an employee as an example of what should not be done. Memos should never include names of those that did wrong. Though the employee may have made an error, these tactics only make you look worse. When needed, reprimanding should always be done in constructive ways and behind closed doors.

I also never talked down to my employees or used intimidation to get them to do their job. Fear is actually one of the worst tools used in trying to motivate employees. Leaders that act more as dictators and use intimidation techniques rarely get the best of even their "star" players. An employee that feels threatened on a daily basis often spends more

time thinking about job security than actually focusing on what they do best. Fear breeds resentment. You're not going to get the best from an employee who spends a lot of time angry at you. I've always worked at being firm as a manager but never intimidating.

People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care

In fact, I've always shown my employees I was their boss, but I was someone they could talk to. They knew they were cared about from the day they were hired. If I cared enough to make them part of my team, then I also made a point to genuinely care about their well-being in its entirety. I believed that by knowing they were cared for, they saw me as someone to work with and not against.

I've continued to reinforce that idea throughout the years by always practicing an open door policy. My employees knew they could come in my office at anytime during the day provided I wasn't busy at the time. I was always open to suggestions as to what we could do to improve their position or grow our company. This also helped my team take greater ownership of their positions by knowing that their opinion really did count.

A rising tide lifts all ships

I understand the value of team incentives. By including a bonus or profit sharing plan for my employees, they knew that when the company was doing well, they would also benefit.



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JONATHAN GOLDHILL

End of the year bonuses were based upon the overall profit brought in that year by the company. I always made it clear that by contributing to the greater good of the whole, they benefited on an individual level.

Learn to listen

Mostly over the years, I've found one of the most effective keys to motivating employees is to know what motivates them individually and designing a motivation program based on those needs. Whatever steps you take to support the motivation of your employees, these steps should first include finding out what it is that really motivates each of your employees. You can find this out

by asking them, listening to them and observing them. Take the time to communicate.

A really effective leader is one that is able to inspire the best in those that work for him. You shouldn't have to force any of your employees to do anything. They do it because they are inspired to do so. To be able to inspire the best in your team is to have true and authentic power as a leader. Remember, motivated employees are employees that take greater ownership of their positions bringing greater value to the company.

Jonathan Goldhill is CEO of The Growth Coach, a Valley-based business coaching company serving entrepreneurs and small business owners. Jonathan can be reached at (818) 716-8826 or e-mailed at Jon@thegrowthcoachla.com. To learn more about his company, visit www.TheGrowthCoach-LA.com.