

Motivating Employees

All employees need help to remain motivated. Let's face it, not every aspect of work is exciting. Some work is downright boring, other work requires us to do things we are not entirely comfortable doing. It is a responsibility of management to help maintain a high level of motivation.

Our workplaces are not the dressing room at half time in a football match. Motivation at work is not achieved through the coach's rah-rah speech, or a General MacArthur type broadcast to the troops. Similarly, motivation is not created by posters, catch-phrases or any other type of motivation saying pasted to workstation walls.

For each individual, remaining motivated is attitudinal. People lack motivation for specific reasons and these reasons need to be addressed. For example, when people do not understand how their work contributes to the greater picture they fail to understand the rationale for the work they do they become disillusioned. It would be easy to simply say, well we will let that person go and find someone else to do the job. Doing so would achieve little. Shooting the messenger does not solve the problem. Instead ensuring the staff member has an understanding of how their role, or task, contributes to outcomes will have a greater motivational impact.

Employee engagement or more specifically, a lack of employee engagement is a key cause of poor motivation. The majority of managers have trouble understanding the concept that the people on their team have a far greater idea of how to get work done than the manager themselves does. This is an egotistical failure of managers. When you have a problem or you seek ideas on how to achieve an outcome go to your people and consult broadly with all levels. Benefit from their experiences. Let them see that their knowledge is valuable and useful. This is one of the greatest motivators of all.

In the modern organisation we have attempted to flatten the hierarchy. This is a good thing. Having layers of management for the purpose of providing a career path, without respect of achieving anything useful is pointless. We should not confuse a career ladder with improved effectiveness. We should understand that every employee has a desire to do the best they can do. Encouraging employees to take on additional responsibility, to develop new competencies, to apply them in differing situations creates interests and builds motivation. The key for you, as a manager, is not to tell someone that you want them to take on additional responsibility; rather to work with them to identify what interests them, to help them identify those opportunities and to facilitate new roles or changes to existing roles.

Our workplace is full of demotivators. These include unfriendly work conditions, ineffective managers, poor communication and poorly designed work practices. Take some time; ask your staff to help identify the things that get in the way of them doing their work, the things that leave them dispirited. If you are a trusted manager they will tell you ways you could improve your management and you, in turn, will be grateful, and become a leader.

Staff will also suggest ways in which the office or workplace could be rearranged, how workflow could improve, how physical infrastructure could be made more friendly, how they are impacted upon by poor communication, how wastage could be reduced. Crikey, if you were to listen and implement only a small percentage of the ideas put forward by your staff you will have removed many of the demotivating factors while at the same time being viewed as a top-line manager. Why wouldn't you want to do this?

Take the time to find out what your people want from work. How do you do that? Ask them. Off course they need to view you as being honest and trustworthy before they will confide in you. If, as a manager, you feel you are not being provided with feedback when you seek it then you might like to take a long, reflective, look at yourself. Ask yourself, do I act upon suggestions, do I make commitments to action, do I provide feedback on progress and do I give credit to others? If you are not sure then the reason for any lack of motivation may rest in your management capabilities.

This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand to help develop leadership capacity and management competencies. We achieve this through consulting, management coaching and professional development opportunities.

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