

Motivating Your Staff in a Time of Change

Want to Know What's Most Important About Motivation?

In today's turbulent, often chaotic, environment, commercial success depends on employees using their full talents. Yet in spite of the myriad of available theories and practices, managers often view motivation as something of a mystery. In part this is because individuals are motivated by different things and in different ways.

In addition, these are times when delayering and the flattening of hierarchies can create insecurity and lower staff morale. Moreover, more staff than ever before are working part time or on limited-term contracts, and these employees are often especially hard to motivate.

Definition of Employee Motivation

Twyla Dell writes of motivating employees, "The heart of motivation is to give people what they really want most from work.

The more you are able to provide what they want, the more you should expect what you really want, namely: productivity, quality, and service." (*An Honest Day's Work* (1988))

Advantages of Employee Motivation

A positive motivation philosophy and practice should improve productivity, quality, and service. Motivation helps people:

- achieve goals;
- gain a positive perspective;
- create the power to change;
- build self-esteem and capability,
- manage their own development and help others with theirs.

Disadvantages of Motivating Staff

There are no real disadvantages to successfully motivating employees, but there are many barriers to overcome.

Barriers may include unaware or absent managers, inadequate buildings, outdated equipment, and entrenched attitudes, for example:

- "We don't get paid extra to work harder."
- "We've always done it this way."
- "Our bosses don't have a clue about what we do."
- "It doesn't say that in my job description."
- "I'm going to do as little as possible without getting fired."

Such views will take persuasion, perseverance, and the proof of experience to break down.

How do you motivate your employees? The Action Checklist for Motivation is designed for managers with responsibilities for managing, motivating, and developing staff at a time when organizational structures and processes are undergoing continual change and can help your organization.

Employee Motivation Action Checklist

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1. Read the Gurus

Familiarize yourself with Herzberg's hygiene theory, McGregor's X and Y theories and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although these theories date back some years, they are still valid today. Consult a digest to gain a basic understanding of their main principles; it will be invaluable for building a climate of honesty, openness, and trust.

2. What Motivates You?

Determine which factors are important to you in your working life and how they interact.

What has motivated you and demotivated you in the past?

Understand the differences between real, longer-term motivators and short-term spurs.

3. Find Out What Your People Want From Work

People may want more status, higher pay, better working conditions, and flexible benefits. But find out what really motivates your employees by asking them in performance appraisals, attitude surveys, and informal conversations what they want most from their jobs.

Do people want, for example:

- more interesting work?
- more efficient bosses?
- more opportunity to see the end result of their work?
- greater participation?
- greater recognition?
- greater challenge?
- more opportunities for development?

4. Walk the Job

Every day, find someone doing something well and tell the person so. Make sure the interest you show is genuine without going overboard or appearing to watch over people's shoulders. If you have ideas as to how employees' work could be improved, don't shout them out, but help them to find their way instead. Earn respect by setting an example; it is not necessary to be able to do everything better than your staff. Make it clear what levels of support employees can expect.

5. Remove Demotivators

Identify factors that demotivate staff - they may be physical (buildings, equipment) or psychological (boredom, unfairness, barriers to promotion, lack of recognition). Some of them can be dealt with quickly and easily; others require more planning and time to work through. The fact that you are concerned to find out what is wrong and do something about it is in itself a motivator.

6. Demonstrate Support

Whether your working culture is one that clamps down on mistakes and penalizes error or a more tolerant one that espouses mistakes as learning opportunities, your staff need to understand the kind and levels of support they can expect. Motivation practice and relationship building often falter because staff do not feel they are receiving adequate support.

7. Be Wary of Cash Incentives

Many people say they are working for money and claim in conversation that their fringe benefits are an incentive. But money actually comes low down in the list of motivators, and it doesn't motivate for long after a raise. Fringe benefits can be effective in attracting new employees, but benefits rarely motivate existing employees to use their potential more effectively.

8. Decide on an Action

Having listened to staff, take steps to alter your organization's policies and attitudes, consulting fully with staff and unions. Consider policies that affect flexible work, reward, promotion, training and development, and participation.

9. Manage Change

Adopting policies is one thing, implementing them is another. If poor motivation is entrenched, you may need to look at the organization's whole style of management. One of the most natural of human instincts is to resist change even when it is designed to be beneficial. The way change is introduced has its own power to motivate or demotivate, and can often be the key to success or failure. If you:

- tell - instruct or deliver a monologue - you are ignoring your staff's hopes, fears, and expectations;
- tell and sell - try to persuade people - even your most compelling reasons will not hold sway over the long term if you don't allow discussion;
- consult - it will be obvious if you have made up your mind beforehand;
- look for real participation - sharing the problem solving and decision making with those who are to implement change - you can begin to expect commitment and ownership along with the adaptation and compromise that will occur naturally.

10. Understand Learning Preferences

Change involves learning.

In their *Manual of Learning Styles* (1992), Peter Honey and Alan Mumford distinguish four basic styles of learning:

- activists: like to get involved in new experiences, problems, or opportunities. They're not too happy sitting back, observing, and being impartial;
- theorists: are comfortable with concepts and theory. They don't like being thrown in at the deep end without apparent purpose or reason;
- reflectors: like to take their time and think things through. They don't like being pressured into rushing from one thing to another;
- pragmatists: need a link between the subject matter and the job in hand. They learn best when they can test things out.

As each of us learns with different styles, preferences, and approaches, your people will respond best to stimuli and suggestions that take account of the way they do things best.

11. Provide Feedback

Feedback is one of the most valuable elements in the motivation cycle. Don't keep staff guessing how their development, progress, and accomplishments are shaping up. Offer comments with accuracy and care, keeping in mind next steps or future targets.

More Tips: Dos and Don'ts For Motivating Your Staff in a Time of Change

Do:

- Recognize that you don't have all the answers.
- Take time to find out what makes others tick and show genuine caring.
- Lead, encourage, and guide staff - don't force them.
- Tell your staff what you think.

Don't:

- Don't make assumptions about what drives others.
- Don't assume others are like you.
- Don't force people into things that are supposedly good for them.
- Don't neglect the need for inspiration.
- Don't delegate work -- delegate responsibility.