

When it comes to motivating employees, sure there are "quick fix" methods to jump start morale around the office. But how do you keep that motivation alive day after day? How do you ensure that each and every person is reaching his or her maximum productive capacity all the time?

There are hundreds of theories and probably as many books on the subject by psychologists, business gurus, and athletic coaches, but most seem to incorporate one if not all of these three factors:

Communication - clear and concise outlines of the organization's goals and expectations;

Empowerment - autonomy that lets departments, teams, and individuals solve problems; and

Recognition - positive feedback accompanied by timely and frequent rewards.

Demolish "Demotivators"

Before delving into these motivation factors, let's first examine what may be keeping your employees from performing their best. In his book *SuperMotivation: A Blueprint for Energizing Your Organization From Top to Bottom*, Dean R. Spitzer identifies factors in the workplace that can slow productivity. He calls them "demotivators."

Demotivators include office politics, stringent rules and regulations, hypocrisy, and internal competition. They often cancel out every well-planned effort to motivate employees, and sour them to the point of no return. Demotivators may be the reason your past employee motivation efforts have not taken off.

Prior to tackling any motivational plan, first attack the demotivators by breaking down your entire company and driving demotivators out of every facet. If you need help in this area, Spitzer offers blueprints in *SuperMotivation* to guide you step-by-step through each department. Get rid of demotivators, and you'll be ready to start on the fun stuff!

Factor 1: Communication

Communication is a critical component in the employee motivation equation. Employees must clearly understand expectations. They should also recognize how they fit into the big picture. Informed employees tend to be the most motivated employees.

Define goals. Goals must be well-defined. No one should question what's expected of them. Make goals and responsibilities constantly visible and chart progress so people can see where they're headed and how far they need to go. Publish goals and expectations in the company newsletter; display posters on cork boards in break rooms; exhibit your mission statement at every workstation; and talk to your people. Never stop sending clear and concise signals.

Listen intently. At the same time, be a receptive listener. Make time to interact with other departments. Open your mind to suggestions and, more importantly, encourage input from all areas. In addition to advertising your goals and expectations, bolster confidence with a positive "can do" attitude. Broadcast your conviction that company goals can be achieved and your people are capable of extraordinary feats. Enthusiasm is infectious!

Create a sense of purpose. Help employees understand the purpose of their jobs and why their positions are important to the company. Explain the significance of other jobs and how the entire organizational structure

works toward accomplishing the company's mission. Creating a sense of purpose promotes team work and instills a sense of pride.

Communicate at all levels. Communicate openly, freely, frequently, positively, and honestly. Keep people informed. It seems simple enough, but how well is it actually exercised in your workplace?

Factor 2: Empowerment

People have a need to be treated as valuable individuals. So it's time to loosen the reigns, trust your employees' judgment, and hold them accountable.

Promote ownership. Assign employees ownership of a task and attach all of the responsibilities that go with getting the job done. If you want to build a better machine, look to the people who operate it. Let them figure out how to improve it. Show them where you keep the toolbox and stand back. Don't stifle momentum by making people jump through hoops for your approval at each juncture. Cut out the regulations and red tape and let them use their best judgment to reach a goal. You're the coach. You're there to guide, support and encourage...keep 'em on the right track.

Try self-monitoring. Let teams or departments make their own rules and track their own productivity. Self-monitoring works on the principle that the system is in place to help, not hinder, employees. It stimulates self-motivation.

Empower your employees. Authorizing employees to take action will impart a sense of pride and ownership in the organization. Autonomy inspires self-motivation and reinforces self-worth. So vest your employees with a degree of power. You'll see innovation taking shape before your eyes.

Try this idea to illustrate the power of motivation. When a problem is plaguing your company, send it out by e-mail or on index cards to all employees asking for suggestions. You might be surprised at where your best solutions come from. At the very least, you'll give everyone in the organization a feeling that they are part of the team and that you value their opinions. Better still, let the person or department that comes up with the best solution enact it, giving them the freedom and resources needed to get the job done. Allowing employees the opportunity to follow through on their ideas may give them a strong sense of accomplishment. Then just watch employee satisfaction skyrocket! In turn, this may motivate employees to share other ideas which will help them and the company be even more successful.

Factor 3: Recognition

Recognition makes people flourish. Tap into the human desire for praise and achievement, and your employees will feel appreciated. They are then much more likely to give it their all.

Look beyond money. It's important to build opportunities for achievement and recognition into the job. But, be aware that traditional rewards such as structured monetary incentives and new titles won't always do the trick. They're not effective long-term strategies for getting the most out of your people. They may only encourage employees to squeak by to achieve the laid out objectives.

Believe it or not, personalized heart-felt gestures of appreciation can often mean more to employees than money or promotions. When used frequently to reinforce productive behavior, these acknowledgments can result in outstanding performance every day.

Consider recognizing super performers with special assignments or give them a role in training. Ask them to make presentations at board meetings or have them write a feature article for your company newsletter.

Integrate spontaneous rewards. Reward a hard-working team with an impromptu pizza party or indulge a notable performer and her husband in a romantic dinner for two during a project that keeps her working late at the office. You can easily create customized inexpensive rewards that will keep your employees working at their best, even during times of extreme pressure.

Reward effort as well as outcome. Recognize those who are trying and making progress even if the goal is not met. Recognition of effort encourages people to keep trying. And a good learning experience can be as productive in the long-run as achieving the goal. Recognition doesn't have to be expensive! It can be as simple as a handwritten thank you note or as elaborate as an awards banquet. It only takes a small amount of consistent reinforcement to maintain a behavior. Once the ball starts rolling, the productive behavior will become a productive work habit.

Summary

Implementing a successful motivational program involves diminishing any and all demotivators while incorporating communication, empowerment, and recognition into your workplace. Integrating employee motivation into your company culture requires a long-term commitment and involves the entire organization. The task merits close and constant examination of every department. Strategies should touch every employee from the top down.

With everything else on your plate, creating a motivating work environment may seem like a huge commitment. But when you consider the benefits, it's a small price to pay. Employee motivation is a proven method of building company loyalty while dramatically increasing productivity.

Give people the right objectives, the right tools, and the right feedback and you'll create a focused, innovative, and outstanding workforce at every level, everyday. Creating a healthy and stimulating environment will be fun for both you and your employees.