Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Manager tips: Ways to motivate employees



Your ability to lead and motivate people is critical to your success as a manager. Motivation is the drive or determination to get something done. While it's an internal force that exists in each individual employee, managers who understand how to enhance employee motivation have the ability to increase team productivity and morale.

When people work together well, there's energy and enthusiasm. When they don't, employees can become dissatisfied or bored with their jobs, and then productivity declines.

As a manager, your ability to build team success is directly affected by how well you can create a highly motivating work environment for each of your employees.

Find out what motivates your employees. Motivation is highly individual, so what motivates you does not necessarily motivate others on your team. In your one-on-one time with the people who report to you, find out what's most important to them. Is it time off with their family? Recognition from you? The opportunity to learn a new skill?

Many managers are surprised to learn that many of the things that employees find to be the most motivating actually focus on doing good work, having the right tools and resources, learning new skills, knowing that their work creates value, and being part of a successful team.

Help your employees prioritize work to focus on the most important tasks. Your employees need to understand your department's key goals and how their work goals support team performance and organizational success. For instance, make sure employees understand why customer service is a priority, even when things are very busy. They need to be able to know how the organization benefits when your team meets or exceeds customer-service measures. Ensure that your employees appreciate the value of their work to increase their sense of purpose and satisfaction.

Train and explain. Make sure your employees have the skills and knowledge to do their work effectively. If they don't, teach them or arrange for them to get the training they need. Explain tasks carefully so that employees know what is expected. Provide regular feedback to keep them on track. Know what work assignments each of your employees enjoys the most and where they excel. When possible, include some of these work tasks in their assignments regularly.

Let people work. Your job is to explain the "what" and "why" of the work and to see that your employees have the skills and tools to do the work. Their job is to get the work done in the way they find most efficient. Keep track of people's progress, but avoid micromanaging or second-guessing people's work.

Within reason, be patient when employees make mistakes -- it's how people learn. Be available to coach, and periodically ask if there are things getting in the way with which you can help. Clearing work obstacles is one of the most positive things you can do as a manager to motivate employees.

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Be generous with positive feedback and recognition. They are the most powerful motivators, as well as the least costly or complex, and yet many managers chronically under-utilize them.

- Look for and reward progress and even small achievements, not just the big accomplishments.
- Acknowledge good work often.Don't use general platitudes like "good job." Be specific about what is good about the effort. Say, "Bill, the way you got that report ready on time and mistake-free, even though we were short-staffed yesterday, really made a difference. Thank you."
- Use your creativity to think of surprising, fun, and meaningful rewards. Special recognition, even something as simple as a handwritten note from you for a job well done can be more motivating than a "standard" reward.
- Encourage senior leaders to offer positive feedback.When an individual reaches a goal, a few words from a senior vice-president to group members can have a big effect on morale.

Expect excellence. People will put their hearts into work if they think the team and the organization are striving for excellence, especially when they feel a sense of purpose in their work and know it is appreciated.

Care about people and show that you care. A positive relationship with their supervisor is a strong motivator for most people. Make time to talk with your staff about things beyond the immediate tasks-at-hand. Ask people how they are doing. Ask what they think of their work. Ask if there are things that are getting in the way of their doing good work.

Don't open your email or look at papers on your desk when someone is talking with you. Your employees are much more likely to care about work if they know that you listen and care about them. Rudeness and lack of respect are always big "de-motivators."

Hire and keep people who are good at the job. People who chronically underperform create an uneven distribution of work on a team. This can lead to resentment from those who are doing their jobs well, and to frustration among those who are having trouble because they do not have the basic skills to succeed.

Deal promptly with performance problems and hiring mistakes. Know about your organization's "probationary" or "orientation" periods, which encourage managers to quickly recognize when new hires aren't working out and allow them to respond effectively. And make sure high-performers know that they are valued.

Lead by example. Be energetic and positive, and your energy will be contagious. Show what it means to focus on the customer and deliver excellent results. Work hard to model important and healthy values. Some managers are authoritarian in style and believe that fear is a motivator -- but it's not. While people will react to intimidation for a short time, a longer period of resentment and lack of motivation will generally follow.

If you have questions about ways to motivate employees, contact your human resources (HR) team or the EAP. Your HR representative or the program may be able to offer ideas and guidance. Or, for more information on motivation, consider reading Daniel Pink's well-regarded book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us.*

Encourage employees to contact the program if they're struggling with motivation or satisfaction at work. Whatever the issue, the program that provided this article may be able to offer practical help and support.