



Motivating Employees

By Gina Wilson, Human Resources Assistant

There was a time when many managers felt that the only motivation employees needed was to know that if they didn't do their job, they would be fired. A paycheck is motivation enough, isn't it? Although some managers may still feel that way, many are now more sophisticated than that and realize that they are competing to get the *best and brightest* to work in their organization.

In the last issue of the Measured Success newsletter, we discussed how employer branding enables you to create a "4-A" organization—that is, one that *attracts* the right candidates, *attends* to shortages within the organization, *advances* retention rates, and *amplifies* employee engagement, commitment, and performance. So how does one foster an organizational culture that leads to engaged, committed, high-performing workers?

Behavioral psychologists – people like Pavlov, Watson, and those who followed them – have taught us that rewards are an effective tool for molding behavior. The corporate world has embraced the importance of rewards. As a result, an entire industry has cropped up, providing catalogs pitching all sorts of motivational rewards: mugs, pens, shirts, medals, ribbons, certificates, paperweights, posters, and so on.

However, employees have become immune to these "rewards." While employees typically appreciate the fact that their efforts have been recognized, they may be turned off by rewards that they see as disingenuous, and they may be

embarrassed to be recognized in this way in a staff meeting or other public venue.

Bob Nelson, author of *Everything You Thought You Knew About Recognition Is Wrong*, states that the most important mode of recognition for the majority of the workers surveyed may be found in the simple form of sincere thanks. When asked to rank the most meaningful forms of recognition, four of the top ten were praise: personal, written, electronic, and public. These are most meaningful when they are generated by individuals that employees hold in high esteem, given in a timely and sincere manner, and when they recognize a specific success or good deed done by the employee.

Recognition programs may fail when they become too formulaic. James Zull, in *The Art of Changing the Brain*, explains motivation in terms of the survival mechanisms that have enabled people to survive from one generation to another. He says that "the brain sees through the extrinsic award. It sees the extrincity. The reward is tempting, true enough, so we devise all sorts of ways to get the reward without carrying out the learning, the job, or the assignments."

Nelson points out that there is more to motivation than just money or awards. Other important motivators include providing support that employees need to do their jobs, genuinely involving employees in decisions, seeking out their opinions and ideas, and backing them up when they take risks or when they make mistakes.

Empowerment and trust are powerful motivators. When employees are given authority and

autonomy like an owner, they take responsibility like an owner. Follow-through, a desire for quality, and concern for the customer are a natural consequence. When employees feel that they are trusted, they tend to respond by being trustworthy. The opportunity to work from home at times, to work flexible hours, to choose their own work assignments, and to manage their own work schedules are ways of showing employees that they are trusted to work responsibly.

The good manager leads forcefully but subtly. In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu wrote that “A leader is best when the people are hardly aware that he exists. Next best is a leader who is loved. Next, one who is feared. The worst is the leader who is despised. When the good leader’s work is done and his aim fulfilled, his followers will say, “We did this ourselves!”

How does one become a leader of the “best” sort? Victor Vroom’s Expectancy Theory informs us that different individuals are motivated by different things. Leading a team effectively requires your understanding what personally makes each employee tick and tailoring how you lead to the individual. It requires being involved with your team, and it takes time.

“Keep in mind that the higher you go up the organization, the more people outnumber you down the organization. No matter what you declare to shareholders or the media about a marvelous new strategic initiative, if all those people below you don’t move individually, the entire organization doesn’t move, either, and then you are left with unfulfilled promises and disappointed shareholders.” – J. Stewart Black and Hal B. Gregersen, *Leading Strategic Change*

Measuring Success!

How to Measure Employee Attitudes

So now you know that satisfied, motivated employees create higher customer satisfaction, but you are not quite sure if *your employees* are satisfied with their work environment. Furthermore, you understand that each individual employee is motivated by different factors and you wonder what motivates *your employees*. You are ready to find innovative ways to motivate your employees, but you are not sure where to begin.

A good place to start is with an employee survey. An employee survey can help an employer measure and understand their employees’ attitudes, opinions, motivation factors, and level of satisfaction towards their job and the organization. If utilized correctly, an employee survey – that management actually uses – can have a positive impact on the climate of an organization.

Why would an organization choose to conduct employee surveys? An employee survey may:

- identify training needs
- provide insight to the employee’s perceptions of the organization’s incentive program
- improve communication between management and employee which in turn may improve motivation
- encourage employee involvement through the process of “listening to” employees opinions

Are you ready to survey your employees? If so, it is important to stress the significance of follow-through. Do not conduct an employee survey if you have no intention of using the results to improve employee motivation and morale. A sure-fire way to de-motivate your employees is to distribute a survey that implies intent to improve the work environment and then allow the data to sit on a desk collecting dust. Before

distributing an employee survey, be prepared, in a timely manner, to review the data gathered and act accordingly. Keep your employees informed of the progress of the survey and the changes on the horizon. Then implement the changes and watch your employees become the motivated workforce you knew was there all the time.

If you need assistance implementing an employee survey, contact HR Consultants, Inc. today. A well-crafted survey tool can help you discover what motivates your employees. Contact our office at the number listed at the close of this newsletter for more information.

Did You Know?

- Incentive Programs that are implemented and tracked correctly increase performance by an average of 22%
- 19% of 1000 surveyed employees rated themselves as “actively disengaged” at work because they do not have the tools they need to do their jobs and they do not know what is expected of them
- In May of 2004, over 27 million full-time wage and salary workers had flexible work schedules

Sources and Recommended Reading:

- Victor Vroom, *Work and Motivation*, 1964
- Bob Nelson, “Everything You Thought You Knew About Recognition Is Wrong” *Workforce Management*, January 2004 (<http://www.workforce.com/section/01/feature/23/61/87/index.html>)
- James Zull, in *The Art of Changing the Brain*, Stylus Publishing, 2002
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov)
- International Society for Performance Improvement

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