

Business

Motivation: the fine art of lifting spirits

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Motivation is an instrument for all seasons. Whether the present economic climate brings forth thriving growth or plummeting decline, motivation remains a constant essential to any manager's arsenal of employee-management tools.

Knowing the right approach with which to apply motivation is the key to maintaining a workforce that is productive, proactive, engaged and most importantly, impervious to any economic situation. In reality, it does not take a lot of effort to motivate well. It just starts with looking at things in a certain way.

Presenting positivity: a matter of perspective

Everyone likes good news, and in good times facts flow in a free and uninhibited manner, because they directly create high spirits. But when the tables are turned and bad sentiments dominate the headlines, leaders often find themselves tempted to sweeten facts or water down figures in order to maintain positivity among employees.

However, no one can escape the hard facts and any form of distortion, no matter how small, can backfire and cause more damage than good. Employees are quick to pick up discrepancies in what they are told, and this has the potential to stir up a far greater degree of distrust and dissent.

Instead, leaders should tackle negative issues head on. Even if a sure solution has not been thought out, the strongest influence on how employees may react is not the message itself, but the implicit confidence that is conveyed, especially in the face of uncertainty.

Show that management is honest and on top of things by presenting bad news in its full gravity. Once employees feel that they have a part to play in formulating a solution, the same degree of confidence displayed will trickle down and spread like wildfire. The best solutions always emerge through positive perceptions of unfavourable situations.

The toolbox of motivation

As an essential management tool, motivation is something that is much easier said than done. It requires a leader who is able to rise above situations - and his or her own feelings - in order to effectively steer subordinates in a positive direction.

Here are three fundamental tactics that leaders can adopt in their missions to motivate:

Communicate: Leaders very often make the mistake of second-guessing their employees' intelligence and capacity for composure. Typically, leaders are slow and reluctant to communicate unfavourable news, such as poor performance or impending job cuts. They fear that a panic-stricken workforce will lead to unmanageable chaos. In fact, clear and straight communication can turn a bad situation into a rallying flag by giving everyone an equal responsibility for curing a problem.

Communication is also a two-way process. Listening, acknowledging and acting on feedback are communicative elements that make subordinates feel like their thoughts and inputs matter. Besides boosting their sense of worth, the simple act of listening will help them to adopt a positive and proactive attitude in any future issue.

Involve: Good leaders do not simply draw up paths of execution and expect their prescribed solutions to be followed without question. The best leaders acknowledge that their subordinates, being closer to the ground, will have points of view and direct experience that will be invaluable to the problem-solving process.

Beyond creating channels that encourage input, employees should be directly involved in solution-forming and execution - at least as much as their capabilities allow. The more a leader adopts the role of a facilitator and supervisor instead of a commander, the more his or her staff will feel motivated to perform.

Appreciate: In sales, repeat customers flock back to a brand when they feel that their purchase has been appreciated or rewarded through after-sales care and support or loyalty programmes.

In the same way, employees want to feel valued for their work and effort, and recognised for having been instrumental in solving problems. There doesn't have to be a monetary value attached to appreciation. A simple thank-you note or praise delivered in front of the department can work wonders for a staff member's pride and motivation. It can also inspire others to strive for a similar degree of excellence.

Motivated staff begins with a motivated leader

The uplifting power of motivation can determine the solidarity of a company in both good times and bad. But before a leader can attempt to motivate his or her subordinates, he or she must first also be motivated.

Therefore, leaders need a higher-than-usual level of resilience in the face of bad situations. As the world currently faces the most severe economic crisis in recent history, leaders from the smallest companies to the biggest nations will undoubtedly face a test of their own motivation. Ultimately, the rise and fall of corporations in the wake of this downturn could boil down to a matter of motivation.

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