



The Strategic Advantage

Motivating Employees

“The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.”

- William James, Psychologist and philosopher

As the leader of your organization, you create your organization’s motivating environment; but you cannot motivate your employees. You can only influence what they are motivated to do. As James suggests, an effective leader brings people closer by demonstrating a concern for their personal values and motivations.

Motivation is inherently intrinsic. It comes from within. Yet, our motivation is affected by extrinsic factors. You cannot motivate people anymore than you can empower them. Employees have to motivate and empower themselves. A fact of human nature is that people are always motivated. But, what are they motivated to do? Your job is to create an environment where employees feel motivated to do a great job every day.

Motivating employees starts with motivating yourself. If you are stressed out, it seems like everyone else is too. Enthusiasm is contagious. If you are enthusiastic about your job, others will be enthusiastic about theirs as well.

What motivates you? A great place to start learning about motivation is to understand your own motivations, although it is important to realize that the same may not motivate any of your employees. Research indicates that

Ways to Create a Motivating Environment

- Build self-esteem by complimenting others on good work
- Show patience and concern
- Ask for input, then do something with it
- Appreciate the quiet employees as well as the extroverts
- Tie raises to performance, not seniority
- Offer specific feedback
- Create an open work environment

more than any other factor, employees want to feel respected and appreciated. Certain extrinsic factors like money, a nice office and job security can help people from becoming less motivated, but they usually don’t help people to become more motivated.

Different things motivate people. Some may be motivated by recognition of a job well done. Others may be motivated by earning time away from the job



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to spend with family. A key goal for you is to understand what motivates each of your employees. It is not difficult to find this out – ask them, listen to them and observe them.

Increased job satisfaction does not necessarily mean increased job performance. If the goals of the organization are not aligned with the goals of the employees, then employees are not effectively working toward the mission of the organization. You need to motivate your employees to do the job you need them to do. It is critical that your managers know what they want from their employees. Whatever steps are taken to support the motivation of employees, be sure that employees have identified their goals and that these goals are aligned with the goals of the organization.

Maintaining motivation during difficult economic times is not easy. You have to state the issues of the organization factually and honestly and present your expectations. Priorities of the organization may change and these changes have to be conveyed to your employees.

Employee motivation during a recession is very much in the hands of an able leader. It is important to let employees know you are in control of the situation. Significant steps to motivating employees during a recession can include: 1) creating new strategies involving employees; 2) keeping the lines of communication open; 3) focusing on the future; and 4) addressing gossip at the onset.

Recognize that achieving and maintaining employee motivation is a process, not a task. Organizations change – just as people do. It is an ongoing process to sustain an

environment where employees can strongly motivate themselves. If you look at sustaining employee motivation as an ongoing process, then you will be much more fulfilled and motivated yourself.

Setting An Example

Kevin Plank, founder of Under Armour, an apparel company in Baltimore says, “Employees are more motivated when they feel needed, appreciated and valued.” “I listen to everyone’s opinions and without fail, they bring up things I had not thought of.”

In the midst of the recession, an advertising agency saw business slow down. The company’s president decided to ramp up the agency’s pro bono efforts – a way to build work portfolios and keep employees sharp and motivated between projects as well as giving back to the community. The projects helped the non-profit community and brought out some of the best work of the employees.

Take Strategic Action

- What can you do to better motivate yourself?
- Do your employees feel appreciated?
- How do you know?
- Have you asked your employees what motivates them?
- What have you done with the answers?
- When did you last listen one-on-one to an employee without interrupting?



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