

Building motivation levels

You've had the team-building day and implemented a comprehensive systems overhaul. The salary reviews went smoothly. Yet performance is still down. Staff motivation is sometimes overlooked - and it can have a huge impact on your business. Unmotivated staff inevitably lead to relaxed discipline, low morale and eventual HR problems. Here are some tactics to help you become the motivator:

Assessing motivation levels

- Are these levels currently acceptable, or are you actually pushing too hard by striving for excellence? Are things generally at a low ebb? Or worse still, are there factors that are clearly destroying staff motivation levels?
- Don't just focus on the high fliers. It can be even more important (and difficult) to motivate the journeymen who fuel the engine room of your business. Identify the people who are the life-blood of the company. The peer leaders of various social groupings are not always the managers, but they frequently set the standards, attitude and behavior of other staff in the area. Sometimes the source problem will be common knowledge at management level or even on the shop floor - perhaps a company setback or loss of employee trust, an unpopular manager or a troublesome team member. Don't ignore it. Left unchecked, the problem may affect motivation levels.

Increasing motivation levels

- Consider a full and frank discussion across all levels of the organisation to determine individual outlooks, identify issues holding the company back and ways to increase motivation. Sometimes employees will feel more comfortable talking to an independent third party on a confidential basis. Bringing issues out into the open is sometimes all that is required.
- Personality assessments are a recognised motivational tool. Who is the best person to lead and motivate a team? What are the hidden talents of your staff? Where is conflict coming from?

- Don't let negatives get everyone down. Bad things can become the office gossip of the day. Circulate positive (true) stories. Turn potentially negative stories into positive ones.
- Motivate your team with rewards. Get the staff to brainstorm ways to recognize each other's achievements. Surprise your team with a treat. Compliment staff often in public and privately.
- Goals help staff motivate and challenge themselves. But be aware that repeated failure can damage morale. Ensure goals are realistic, and that you have a road map to achieve them.
- Be aware that individual merit incentives may undermine teamwork. Each employee's attitude has an impact on the overall attitude of the office. Consider the global approach, rewarding all based on company-wide results.
- Build a culture of respect. Involve staff in decisions. Seek their advice. Establish relationships with individual members of your staff, and pay attention to what uniquely motivates different people.
- Give your staff opportunities to represent the company. Allow them to attend conferences, take on leadership roles with professional associations and establish a network of contacts. Although apparently risky, your support actually contributes to satisfaction in your employee's current job.