

BOOST EMPLOYEE MORALE

The current climate that businesses are operating in does not offer any promising turnaround. Businesses are too focused on the negative, and economic threats, terrorist threats, the war, etc. are contributing to a continued downward spiral in morale.

Studies have proven that the morale of a company's workforce is directly linked to profitability. Low morale - low profits. High morale - high profits. This is because workers who are happy in their job and with their employer perform better, resulting in higher and improved productivity and profitability.

Prior to all the terrorist activity and outbreak of war, it was mostly the workers whose morale was poor, but now management is showing signs of concern and their lack of optimism does nothing for the existing morale of their workers. What is even more alarming is if management has this attitude, it will confirm in their employee's minds that any effort is futile, so what- s the use?

What does all this mean? Well, apart from a larger number of unhappy people in the workforce, if immediate steps are not taken to boost morale, few businesses will see any respectable profits within the next six months. If management and workers are both coming from a place of negativity, it spells serious trouble for business.

Surveys performed by Gallup have shown that the old-fashioned methods of offering financial incentives, company cars, etc. do not produce long term benefits. Their research has found that as many as two-thirds to three-quarters of people employed in Sales, for example, are performing at much lower standards, which has a detrimental effect on the entire business. Add to this a management that agrees with them and you can see the trouble for which they're headed.

Employees and managers need to feel emotionally attached to their work and their employer in positive and uplifted ways. Senior management needs to convey optimism and send that down the line, with a message that conveys strength and security. They need to encourage and show frequent appreciation of every employee's efforts, and find ways of helping employees work in jobs that utilise natural talents. Both employees and management need to know that what they are doing is highly appreciated, that opportunities for advancement and self-growth are available within and by the company, and they need to come to work in a happy and positive environment.

It is a mistake to think that morale will improve when business picks up, or the war is over. Of course, these things do have an impact on company morale, but for a long term improvement, focus needs to be placed on the individual within the organisation. When everybody goes to work and loves what they do and where they work, their productivity is high which produces the profitable results for the business. The challenge is matching employees to roles in which they can and will shine - sometimes it is possible to modify existing roles to bring out the best in the employee, and other times it may require a transfer to a different position or department. In any case, consultation with the employee is important.

More and more companies are hiring professional Coaches to establish methods by which employee and management morale will be permanently boosted and profitability assured. Many H.R. professionals are seeing the benefits in the Coaching procedure and are learning coaching skills to use within their organisation. But for those businesses that choose to try and sort it out themselves, they can take steps that are definitely in the right direction.

1) Research and analyse, with employee and management participation, to determine just what factors are at play that affect morale within their organisation. You will find this includes things that involve individual satisfaction with work roles right through to ineffective company policies and practices or lack of clear direction, poor management, etc. Brainstorm ways in which grievances and complaints that affect morale can be turned around - put in place improved methods and let it be seen by employees and management alike that procedures are in progress that address these issues. Openly invite and encourage honest employee feedback.

2) Motivate employees and management - ask for their ideas on motivational practices, rewards, etc. that they consider valuable and implement those that can be implemented. Recent research has indicated that company paid-for training is more highly regarded by employees than the provision of a company car. Training and the continuous upgrading of skills and education more readily assures an employee's future employability and promotional prospects, whereas a company car does neither.

3) Always show appreciation to every employee, no matter where they are on the ladder. Let staff know you take pride in them and their efforts. Make a fuss over success - acknowledge successes openly.

4) Self-empower. Encourage individuals to take responsibility for their work roles and to feel free to suggest and implement ways in which procedures might be improved. Let them have a hand in setting job goals.

5) Prepare a new company mission statement - but this time include the active participation of every employee - this allows them to feel involved in the future direction of the company.

6) Promote a "family" atmosphere, encourage workers to care about each other, to support each other and trust each other. Suggest such things as car-pooling, or develop a Social Club. Offer barbecues.

7) Promote pride in the company. Employees today are concerned with the values and ethics of their employers. Ensure the company is one in which the employees can take pride.

8) Show interest in individuals - permit them to be *human* during work hours. It is not possible to leave personal issues *at home* - it doesn't work that way. People appreciate care being shown to them and assistance to deal with personal issues. Today's manager must also be an adviser, counsellor, coach, trainer and a good listener!

9) Find other ways in which life can be made more pleasant and easier for employees. This can be organising affordable day-care facilities for children, flexible work timetables, gym memberships, weight loss program assistance, counselling, etc.

10) Show loyalty. Before laying off employees, discuss with their department ways in which layoffs might be avoided. Let it be seen that the company really is trying to avoid laying off anybody. Some people may even suggest a cut in pay for the short term until business picks up, in order that everyone may still keep their job. You'd be surprised how inventive employees can be, given the opportunity. Let employees know that promotional opportunities are available and help them achieve their goals.

BONUS TIP: 11) Finally, how is the working environment? The workplace should be safe and pleasant. Don't expect employees to use out-dated, faulty equipment or furniture. Ensure air-conditioning and heating systems function correctly, and noise levels are acceptable. Are there adequate car-parking facilities? Is the area well-lit? And with anxieties at an all-time high regarding increased terrorist activity, make sure you have emergency procedures in place to protect the workforce in the event of an attack, and ensure every employee is aware of these procedures.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and an improved morale will not happen overnight. A key factor in boosting morale and productivity is **employee participation** in making and/or changing rules and procedures/policies. Having a say makes them feel "part" of the company and gives them a vested interest in outcomes. Having a loyal and motivated staff will produce innumerable benefits, including increased productivity and the resultant increase in profitability.

Pay raises and bonuses are soon forgotten, but **on-going praise, self-worth, a sense of importance** and achievement last forever. When you acknowledge and reward good behaviours, you get more of the same. It may be something as simple as the way an employee answers the phone, or neat work, or timely completion of tasks, or working overtime one day, or providing good customer service. Every positive behaviour should be acknowledged publicly and verbally. Sometimes, on special occasions, a **hand-written thank you** from the CEO or President is appreciated. Some kind of employee recognition program could be designed by which individuals are given wide recognition for their efforts.

To get out of the slump, businesses cannot afford to wait around until they're certain the war is over and they're safe from another terrorist attack, and with or without these fears, there are definite steps that can be taken now and which will make a huge difference to a company's performance. It may sound trite to repeat that people really are a company's best asset, but time and research has found that this is the truth, so whether a business intends to make a profit in the next 6 months, or scrape by in mediocrity, really will depend on how they treat their best asset.

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