MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

The success of any business is determined by the performance of the individuals who comprise it - from the entry-level worker to the CEO. While job skills are certainly important and necessary, they do not guarantee that the individual will perform optimally.

In fact, in an extensive longitudinal study of job performance, it was found that ability accounted for 1 percent of performance, and that training and experience accounted for 14 percent. The remaining 85 percent of employee performance was determined by motivation. Thus, the task of motivating employees must be a priority for every manager.

THREE KEY INGREDIENTS OF MOTIVATION

In order to accomplish this formidable task, it is critical that you understand the nature of motivation.

The motivation of employees involves much more than back-slapping, rah-rah pep talks and hype. Instead, a manager must make a careful and thorough study of each employee to discover the person's perceptions of his/her own capabilities and the outcomes he/she desires from work performance, both of which determine motivation by the assessment and provision of individually preferred outcomes.

Well-known motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said, "You can get everything in life you want if you just help enough other people get what they want."

How can you do that? According to Vroom's Theory of Motivation, which has been well tested in organizational settings, three key ingredients must be present, in the employee's perception, if that person is to be highly motivated.

1. **The employee must believe that high effort can lead to high performance.**

    That is, the person must have confidence that if he or she really tries, this will results in accomplishment of the task. If the individual lacks understanding of what is required, does not believe that he/she has the necessary skills, thinks that performance standards are unrealistic, or has generally low self esteem based on past failure experiences, he or she will be unwilling to put forth the necessary effort. Workers are willing to approach only those tasks in which they believe they can succeed.

2. **The person must believe that, if he or she does perform effectively, personally satisfying outcomes will result.**

    For example, recognition for a job well done may be an outcome that is very important to a given employee. If you fail to notice that employee's extra effort, you may soon overhear the person comment to a co-worker, "What's the use of killing yourself around here? Nobody cares." Therefore, if you are to be effective in motivating employees, you must observe and communicate with employees. You need to learn what outcomes are strongly valued by each employee so that you can work to see that the person's efforts are rewarded by things that matter to him or her. Importantly, help the employee learn that these outcomes will be readily available following outstanding effort.

3. **The positive outcomes must outweigh the negative ones.**

There is no task, no job, no life experience that does not have some down sides. Despite this, people persist even through the most adverse circumstances when they believe that the effort is "worth it;" this is, that the benefits outweigh the costs.

In diagnosing employee motivational problems, then, critically analyze working conditions and creatively structure the work environment and worker responsibilities so that unnecessary hardships are minimized. Further, engage in ongoing communication and collaborative problem solving with the employee. Helping the worker to see the hassles as a necessary part of the process of reaching an important goals can lead to greater understanding and better coping.

As you develop greater understanding of the personal motivation system of each person under your supervision, and as you develop daily habits of noticing what "turns on" each employee, the results will be astounding. Motivated employees who are performing at their best are key ingredients to a high-energy, high-profit workplace.