

Leadership Update

Motivating Employees – The Leader’s Job

Hal Johnson

Did you know that most people in the US currently are unhappy with their jobs? It’s true. A recent CNN article mentions job satisfaction has hit a 22 year low. Despite going through one of the worst job markets in history, the majority of those still employed aren’t even satisfied with their job. This we know -- unhappy employees are unmotivated and unproductive employees.

So, how can you motivate your employees and make their work life a bit more enjoyable? That is part of our jobs as leaders – effectively getting work accomplished through others. And, they will get a lot more accomplished if they are motivated. So, take a gulp of coffee and ask yourself – what am I doing to help my people feel like giving their best?

This is where it gets challenging. If there was one motivation tactic that worked for everyone, we sure wouldn’t have this job satisfaction problem. Everyone is motivated differently.

Here’s some insight: Don’t automatically think that money = motivation. If someone works in a miserable environment, bonuses and raises might keep them there, but it won’t make them enjoy their work in the long term. Take Zappos (on-line shoe business) for example. Check out their website for an inspiration. Their salaries are on the low end, but their employees love their jobs.

So, what’s the secret? While there’s no silver bullet, here are a few tips that we’ve picked up over the years to help you get the best attitudes in place:

1. **Everyone wants to think their work is important.** If an employee’s work led to something positive for the company, let them know. Tell them how their work contributes to success. Give them some positive encouragement.
2. **Express gratitude.** Thank your employees for their hard work. A thankless job is the last thing anyone wants. Let your employees know they are appreciated and they are making a contribution.
3. **Surprise them every once in a while.** Bring in croissants, buy a pizza for lunch, or take your team to lunch. You’d be surprised what a thoughtful gesture does for motivation.
4. **Challenge them.** Much of our responsibility as managers is getting work accomplished through others. It’s our job to be creative and resourceful in developing meaningful work to “drive through the process.” If you are not delegating meaningful work, something is wrong with your model. You need to be thinking ahead in terms of keeping your people growing and challenged. This is your job.

Just being aware of the need to motivate is your starting point. Can you take it from there? Good motivating.

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