

by David Peterson, Managing Partner

There's a perception that most people would be happy just to have a job during times when company layoffs are in the news every day. You would think that the security of a job would be enough to motivate your people to perform at high levels. However, from my experience, security doesn't seem to solely motivate employees, especially top performers. You still stand the risk of losing them to your competitors. That's why managers need to think about key motivators during both good and bad times to keep the best on board.

The following are 7 effective ways to motivate your employees during tough times that are minimal in cost:

- **Give recognition.** Right now, your staff is hearing negative news all around them thus, a pat on the back is more important than ever. Recognize a job well done and from time to time, bring in small rewards such as bagels or donuts.
- **Empower employees.** Ask your employees to be creative by offering ideas on how to make the company successful and improve performance. If the results of an idea are measurable and quantifiable, the employee can be rewarded with a percentage of the cost savings.
- **Keep lines of communication open.** Be honest with your employees and let them know where your company stands financially during this period. Your company and employees need to be aligned.
- **Clarify expectations.** Your staff wants to know what is expected of them during this economic down turn. Often times, their job role will change especially if your company is trying to do more with less. Set expectations realistically and don't become increasing hard-grinding. This will only stress them out.
- **Offer work/life balance.** It is important to remain flexible and still make allowances for your workers to attend their child's school function or take care of personal needs. A little extra time off is a great motivator and can also create loyalty among your employees.
- **Improve work environment.** Atmosphere greatly and directly affects the motivation level and feeling of well being of the employees in a workplace. When possible, provide comfortable and aesthetically pleasing furniture. Lighting, flowers and artwork can also help improve employee morale and inspirational phrases posted to the bulletin board can be uplifting.
- **Invite external speakers & continue to invest in training.** Bring in an external motivational speaker to address your people and then reinforce those key messages made by the speaker. Also, continue training programs since this will keep your staff on the career track they counted on.

There's no doubt that it's harder to keep your employees focused and energetic during today's economic climate but implementing some motivational programs is a step in the right direction. These programs will help employees stay positive despite the negative situations around them. In addition, well executed programs will help you retain top talent. Remember, competitors love to snatch high performers much like professional sports teams do in the best of times as well as in these uncertain times.



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