healthyworking

A workplace wellness update

Increasing morale in the workplace does make a difference

Building Morale in the Workplace

As the current economic situation puts pressure on organizations' bottom line, workers are also feeling the strain. The result can often be decreased morale. In a recent survey of 60,000 workers, 80 per cent reported they were stressed at work "sometimes to always." Stress is the largest health-related productivity cost at work, so ensuring your employee's stress levels are low not only benefits the individual but the organization as a whole. And as employees serve as ambassadors for your organization, their happiness can make or break its reputation to job seekers, clients and stakeholders. Good morale promotes good business. Read on to discover how you can build morale among your employees.

Give Praise Where Praise is Due

Neglecting to give credit and praise is one of the fastest ways to decrease employee morale. This is especially important during tough economic times. While companies are seeking to cut back on expenses and downsize, employees are being asked to do more with less. So when employees are going above and beyond, don't let it go unnoticed. Write a thank you note or sing their praises in an e-mail to a superior. If it is a valuable contribution to a team effort, make it known to the team; if it is towards a branch-wide effort, make it known to the branch. Whether during a meeting or via e-mail, praise lets employees know their hard work is not only valuable but appreciated.

Communication

Knowledge is power, and communicating effectively with employees empowers them in their decision-making while fostering trust and loyalty in your leadership. Maximize the benefits of good communication and:

Don't 'spin.' When you don't have the answer or you have to share bad news, refuse to 'spin' your message. Instead choose to maintain transparency. You will save your employees from being blind-sided later and will earn their respect for being honest.

Keep the lines open. Reasons for poor morale, such as rumours of 'cut backs' or ongoing disagreements on teams, can only be resolved when they are recognized. If employees know you are open in communicating to them, they will feel more comfortable in coming to you when they have a problem.

Work Hard, Play Hard

Create a culture of 'work hard, play hard' by taking some time out of the work schedule for employees to interact and have fun on a regular basis. Dedicating time, whether a few minutes daily or an hour out of the week, for fun and interaction increases employee morale and productivity.

Performance-Based Rewards

Performance-based rewards enable employees to work towards their individual success while working towards the success of the organization as a whole. However, during an economic downturn, these rewards are often the first things to go. If your organization doesn't offer a rewards program, or you are faced with cutbacks in this area, you need to get creative and seek out new ways to reward employees for their efforts that won't break the bank or go over budget.

Rewards don't have to include new cars or expensive cruises. Tickets for special events, lieu time or even a staff lunch day, potluck or otherwise, can all be financially modest ways to acknowledge a job well done. Make sure to keep these goals:

Simple. Communicate a clear objective so workers know exactly what they must do to receive a reward.

Attainable. Unattainable goals can decrease morale, so ensure your objective is realistic and one employee's can pursue with enthusiasm.

Timely. Offer weekly or monthly awards that are compelling motivators to generate positive business results such as accolades for excellent customer service or increased productivity.

Focused. Set objectives that allow workers to track their progress, see the finish line and reap rewards in a timely way.

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In sharing ideas as a team and lightening the workload together, you'll not only increase morale but will also save money and speed up your business processes.

Offer flexibility. Providing the option to work from home during bad weather (when appropriate), a more flexible schedule, or allotting personal days off to care for a sick family member can increase morale by helping people feel more in control of their life and supported during trying times.

Seek extra support. Tap into additional help as a manager and refer employees to information and resources available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Balance the Workload

When people are overloaded with work, their stress levels increase and their morale and productivity go down. Help employees balance their workload and:

Step back. Take a step back and look at the process in which employees' tasks are accomplished. Are there any places where a more efficient method can be found? Are there tasks that can be outsourced or reassigned? Are there time-wasting, low value-added activities that have become redundant? Necessity can be the mother of invention, so when companies are seeking to economize and workers are left with fewer resources, it's time to get creative. Get your team together and ask them for their input on how you, as a team, can be more efficient and innovative in how you do business.

Respect their time. Avoid unnecessary meetings. Use modern technology to your advantage, such as conference calling and video conferencing, to minimize travel time. Give a few more minutes of your own time to explain assignments. If you outline your directives clearly, there will be fewer changes and less back and forth in the completion of an assignment.

Set realistic deadlines. Ensure deadlines are attainable and seek to synchronize work flows between employees where tasks are interdependent.

Prioritise. Make sure everyone knows the order of priorities and that they have the tools at hand to meet them. Try holding a *'post-it note meeting'* every morning. Go over what the top priorities are for the day and make them fit on a post-it. Anything not on the post-it is worked on only when the items listed are completed.

High employee morale can seem like an abstract and elusive concept, but it's vital to the health and competitiveness of an organization, especially in this tough economic climate. It not only helps employees stay motivated but innovative—an important quality when they're often being asked to accomplish more with fewer resources. In supporting your employees by celebrating their achievements, rewarding their hard work, and offering opportunities for growth and flexibility, you'll help increase staff morale *and* improve your organization's bottom line.

Learning and Development

It is important to understand your employees' strengths and areas they want to develop so you can provide them opportunities within their job to work towards these goals. Read below and discover how you can help expand each person's unique skills and enhance their interests.

Consider courses. Find out what resources your organization offers for learning and development. Are there courses offered internally? Is there funding for an employee to gain additional training through an outside institution? If your budget is limited or you need to scale back, there are ways that you can cut costs in this area and still have employees get the knowledge they need to stay competitive. Choose webinars (online seminars) instead of the more expensive option of sending employees to a conference in another city, or encourage self-directed learning. Also, there are many ways an employee can find learning and developmental opportunities on the job. If an employee takes interest in a specific area, have the worker job shadow someone experienced in that area or ask him or her to join a project that involves this skill set. Making learning and development options known to your team and encouraging them to pursue their career goals can help members to stay encouraged, motivated and strengthen the skills of your team.

As you actively engage in creating a healthier work environment the following employee-training workshop may also be of interest to you:

Living Well with Stress:
This session focuses on how stress left unaddressed can add to absenteeism and has the potential to turn into a major mental or physical health concern. You will identify personal stressors and symptoms while learning how to effectively manage stress for increased health, well-being and workplace productivity.

Please contact your Human Resources Department or Shepell·fgi Account Manager to find out more about how you can schedule a training workshop for your employees.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP. All contact between you and your EAP is completely confidential.

English Service: 1.800.268.5211
French Service: 1.800.363.3872

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