

## Motivating people effectively

KAREN LEWIS provides a practical guide to enhancing your career prospects through the creation of a motivated, successful team.



It is an accepted business axiom that a manager is only as good as his or her team. To ensure you achieve business success as a manager, it is vital to have a highly motivated team who can perform effectively. Some managers will be aware of theories of motivation – e.g. Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*, Herzberg’s *Hygiene Factors*, McClelland’s *Three Styles*, etc. – having come across them on training courses and so forth. However, much of this material is too theoretical to be of use to the busy manager. This article shows you how to put into practice some easy to use and positive steps to create and sustain a highly motivated, and therefore high-performing, team.

### Recognising needs

People are pretty complex and do not necessarily all have the same needs at the same time. Furthermore, their needs change on an irregular basis, either because they have been satisfied or because more important ones have taken their place.

As a manager, one of the first steps towards motivating your team is to recognise and satisfy the needs of individuals. You can assess needs fairly easily if you take the time to get to know your team. When designing jobs, working conditions and team or department structures, think about the full range of potential needs individuals have – pay, reward

and conditions, respect, achievement and interaction with others.

### Sticks and carrots

Retail organisations are rapidly moving away from ‘command and control’ management and towards ‘coach and consent’ methods of motivating. “*A few may nibble at the carrot, but all will duck to avoid the stick*” is an anonymous quote referring to the outdated notion of motivation that was extensively employed in retail organisations throughout the 70s and 80s.

The 90s signalled a change in attitude, when retail managers acknowledged that rewarding and recognising good work was more effective than threatening punitive measures for bad work. This latter ‘big stick method’, using fear as a motivator, was seen to lose managers respect and exacerbated a bad performance.

### Avoiding demotivation

As well as spending time motivating the team, also keep your eyes open for any signs of demotivation, which can be very contagious. Demotivation may not always be signposted but look out for the following clues:

- Defensive, protective actions or sudden outbursts of anger
- Inattention, non-participation and non-communication
- Sloppy, ‘couldn’t care less’ attitude or shoddy work
- Lack of enthusiasm for the work
- Prolonged or sudden lateness or



absenteeism.

People engaging in the above types of behaviour generally do so for a reason: to gain attention. As a general rule, some attention is better than none at all and people would rather be reprimanded than ignored. Managers who disregard these signs risk disastrous consequences. The person concerned will become more demotivated and may eventually take more drastic action such as disruption within the team, gossiping, etc. Here are some potential reasons why people become demotivated:

- Lack of recognition
- Uninteresting work, lack of stimulation or boredom
- Lack of involvement in decisions, changes, etc.
- Ideas or views not encouraged or acknowledged, or dismissed when offered
- Lack of personal development or training
- Lack of delegation or authority
- Constant (unconstructive) criticism
- No praise for effort or good results
- Poor systems/processes
- Overload – too much work or pressure.

Recognising demotivation alone is pointless: you need to be committed to eradicating its causes. How can you help to prevent demotivation amongst your team? It

starts with basic but sound people management principles:

- Develop great communication skills and use them
- Delegate work and responsibility
- Train staff to do the job and offer personal development to progress their skills and careers
- Involve staff in decision making and encourage ideas
- Give sincere praise or criticise constructively when it is due.

#### **Take the workplace 'temperature'**

It is important to measure workplace motivation on a regular basis to discover if and why the team are experiencing problems. However, if you encounter an unexpected rise in leavers or absenteeism, motivation is probably low and immediate action may be required. Remember that lack of motivation may have many causes, so do some research before jumping to conclusions.

To measure motivation you may wish to try using employee attitude surveys. These give a broad indication of morale but they can be time consuming and costly, so a short-term or more immediate measure would be to talk to people regularly.

You can do this during performance

reviews or team meetings, or you can set up one-to-one interviews or focus groups. Remember, once you have taken the time to investigate staff opinions and attitudes, you must act and communicate quickly on the findings. Enquiring into attitudes carries with it an implicit promise of reform; otherwise you risk making the situation worse by increasing demotivation.

Another management process that yields results is the exit interview. When staff leave the organisation, conducting an exit interview can yield valuable insight into the perceived strengths and weaknesses of your management style and how you motivate the team. Staff are more likely to give honest opinions when they are already committed to leaving the organisation.

#### **Building & harnessing motivation**

An essential basis for motivation is a positive work environment created by you. Ensure you have clear directives from your boss so that you can set clear objectives for your team and give clear orders. Establish a performance system that is productive rather than obstructive, in which people are able to perform at their best. Ascertain where an individual's strengths and interests lie and then delegate responsibilities that will exploit these. Additionally, you need to ➔

# CareerSkills (cont'd)

ensure you are treating your staff well. You must demonstrate trust in your staff and prove yourself worthy of trust. This trust, on your part, includes:

- Never making promises you are unable or not intending to keep
- Never asking others to do anything you would not do yourself
- Ensuring your team know they can count on your respect and your loyalty, unless and until they prove undeserving.

As far as you have the authority to, you must ensure that working conditions, pay and status issues, job security and working atmosphere are managed in a way that is acceptable to the team.

Calculate your own motivation. Your team will not respond to an uncommitted manager, so it is important for you to motivate yourself as well as others. The amount of energy you put into your work will indicate your level of motivation. If you are unable to make decisions, reluctant to begin necessary tasks or unwilling to strive for achievements – these are all signs that you are demotivated.

## **Create a no-blame, no-fear culture**

Everyone makes mistakes. The lessons of failure can be very valuable and not only to the individuals involved but also the organisation. A culture that fears failure will not take up opportunities and may never realise potential. Don't run your department/store/unit where staff are too afraid to put their head above the parapet for fear of it being shot off!

Accept the risks. When you delegate a task or project to a member of the team accept that there may be a risk of failure. You can manage and minimise risks by ensuring the delegate is fully briefed and fully prepared before starting the task. However, if the task is failed, then discuss the reasons for the failure in order to eliminate them and strengthen the platform for success. Taking a constructive and sympathetic attitude to failure will motivate and encourage people. Punishing failure or motivating using fear will create resentment rather than lasting success.

Finally, be clear about what learning from failure and managing in this way really means. Make it clear that tolerance of

error has a limit. Repetition of the same error is not OK since it shows failure to learn from previous mistakes and sloppy standards of work. Be firm but fair when you are drawing attention to error, and do not pull any punches.

## **In summary**

If you are a good motivator you can be described as a person who:

- Analyses individuals' needs
- Strives to satisfy individual needs
- Gives sincere and genuine praise when due
- Gives praise for effort and behaviour as well as results
- Involves the team as far as possible
- Gives spontaneous rewards for outstanding results and effort
- Encourages and facilitates regular two-way communication
- Is seen as approachable and listens to what people have to say
- Looks for signs of demotivation and acts immediately.

You are not motivating effectively if you are:

- Using the 'carrot' (incentives) and the 'stick' (fear and punishment)
- Ignoring people's ideas, concerns or thoughts
- Putting obstacles in the way of performance
- Forcing staff to do what you want rather than try to influence and persuade them
- Not being honest with your staff and keeping them in the dark
- Only praising exceptional results
- Ignoring signs of demotivation.

To fully realise the potential of your team, it is important to understand how to motivate each individual but also to remember that using motivational tactics will always result in fairly short-term changes or effects. To achieve real sustainable long-term results, develop 'self-motivation'.

Recruit people who are already highly self-motivated and then provide the conditions to allow them to grow. Inspire them by trusting them to work on their own initiative, taking responsibility for their tasks. Highly self-motivated individuals and teams are able to work through their objectives and set deadlines as well as find new methods for doing things. In addition, and crucially for your career, less management input is generally needed in this type of team – freeing-up time to allow you to concentrate on other important matters.

