

Increasing Motivation & Engagement

Finding and retaining employees is one of the largest issues for companies big and small across America. We are currently in a time in which we have too many open job positions and too little (or no) job applicants. With such steep competition for workers, the time has come for companies to truly start focusing on how to keep the workers they already have motivated and engaged. This will not only help to maintain current employment numbers, but can increase our ability to bring in new applicants as we build a company culture worth joining and sticking around for.



If worker contributions are ignored, especially repeatedly over time, your team is going to stop caring about being productive or setting goals for success. What's the point of working hard if nobody cares that the job is being done well? We can easily prevent this type of behavior by simply speaking up and taking action to notice, reward and praise. This can be done by verbally acknowledging an employee as you observe work in process, rewarding employees with extra breaks or small gift cards to a local coffee shop, wage

increases at review times, group setting announcement of a job well done, etc. There are infinite ways to show recognition to employees, you just have to find the ones that work best for your team.

Leadership is our biggest asset when it comes to retaining employees and motivating them to not only stay in our employment, but to succeed and grow within the organization. When work is held in high value by the employees, and leadership is actively engaged with each worker, the issue of turnover can be significantly reduced. Whenever a company supports its employees through excellent leadership and coaching, turnover rates drop significantly. If employees feel better about their jobs, they are less likely to leave.

Another great way to build a strong and motivated team, is to encourage recognition among peers. Celebrating accomplishments doesn't have to come exclusively from leadership. Positive feedback and recognition from colleagues can also help boost engagement by creating a sense of trust and camaraderie throughout an organization. When employees have a positive emotional investment in the success of their teammates, they're more likely to be engaged in their work to further that success.

Eight Leadership Ideas for Increasing Worker Motivation and Engagement

1. Figure out Learning Styles

Take the time to understand the learning style of each of your employees. Everyone has a method of learning that works best for them, this could include one or a combination of any of the following styles: visual, hands-on activity, computer-based, one-on-one, individual, classroom and aural. Once you understand how your employees learn, you will be able to train and coach them on job duties with efficiency and an increased transfer of knowledge.

2. Recognize a Job Well Done

The simple act of acknowledging an employee's work and appreciating their contributions can go a long way in building rapport and respect with your staff. An employee that feels acknowledged is more likely to care about their performance and avoid behaviors that lead to performance deterioration or disciplinary action. When leaders take the time to highlight successes – whether small or big – workers can feel confident that their contributions matter and that they are moving towards reaching their goals.

3. Define the Path for Success and Advancement

One of the largest factors for motivating employees is providing them with long-term opportunities to stay with the company and move up the ladder towards leadership and/or advanced job assignments.

Defining future opportunities for growth is essential for increasing worker commitment to a company. This is particularly true of millennials who have a tendency to have frequent job changes as they look for upward movement and career advancement. If managers take the time to engage employees in career discussions and set long-term goals for employees, companies can create plans that help workers to develop the skills they need to take on additional responsibility in the future.

Once an employee feels they are on a clear path for success, they are more likely to take greater ownership of their responsibilities while also focusing on the success of the company overall. Employees working towards career growth will also set goals that help them to avoid feeling as if they are stuck in the same job with no end in sight.

4. Build Two-Way Communication

Good communication skills allow managers and leaders to perform their roles more effectively.

It's important to build a culture of communication in which managers and employees share common goals and work together to meet them. Types of communication can include emails, texting, training sessions, memos, newsletters, FAQs, one-on-one discussions, and regular meetings.

However, simply sharing information isn't enough to promote engagement. Employees need to know that communication flows both ways. Managers should work to let their team know that anybody can take their concerns or ideas to leadership, and that all comments/ideas/concerns will be listened to and valued. This goes beyond simply having an open door policy. Being able to voice concerns is one thing, but knowing that someone is there to genuinely listen to them and take them seriously is quite another. Effective leaders are generally proactive communicators who encourage people to speak out and let everyone know they're willing to listen.

Another thought to keep in mind is that nobody likes being kept in the dark. Organizations that operate with a lot of secrecy and keep employees on a strict "need to know" basis tend to struggle with low engagement and retention rates. People want to know about decisions that affect them, what is expected of them, and information that may be relevant to their work.

5. Be Fair and Realistic

As a company leader, providing your team with attainable standards and reasonable company rules to abide by (i.e. the company handbook) is critical to building respect and success among your workers. Additionally, you have to hold yourself to those same standards and policies to retain their respect. If you adopt a "do as you're told, not as I do" attitude, you will surely fail as a leader.

Workers also need to be shown that company policies and procedures are in place for a reason and are always to be followed, they are not "pick-and-choose." If employees believe that the rules don't apply to some people, they are more likely to become frustrated and voice their displeasure in unproductive ways that undermine the morale and performance of the entire team.

Employees need a clear and defined foundation of what is expected of them and how to succeed within the organization, and they need to feel confident that they will be judged primarily on their performance rather than factors outside their control such as an emotional or unreliable manager or team.

Leaders also need to make sure that their expectations are realistic. While engaged employees will often take on a heavier workload than their less-engaged peers, leaning too

heavily on them can burn them out or lead to resentment. Similarly, if even routine tasks seem to be overwhelming, employees may give up to some extent and allow their performance standards to slip below acceptable levels.

6. Ensure Workers Have the Tools for the Job

We all know that the right tool gets the job done more efficiently and will create higher levels of productivity. These tools may include knowledge, training, protective gear, hardware (tools and machinery) and mentorship. Never just assume that each and every one of your employees has all the tools, training, and support they need – check in with them personally and find out. Get to know their strengths and weaknesses and figure out how to provide them with the tools necessary to eliminate their weaknesses and increase their strengths.

Often times, workers (particularly newer employees) won't know what tools they need for optimal success; it's our job as managers to work closely and communicate with staff to figure out what tools each individual needs to be the best at their job.

7. Provide Meaningful Coaching

Consistent feedback is another great motivator. Feedback can be praise for a job well done, offering quick tips to more efficiently complete a task, formal discussions about performance or brief but meaningful corrective coaching to stop a behavior that may lead to poor performance. Don't only rely on periodic reviews to be present with your staff and notice their work; instead, offer feedback as often as possible.

By providing daily coaching (whether brief or in-depth), you're demonstrating to your team that you care about their success and are invested in enhancing their skills. When employees feel seen and heard, they are more likely to aim for higher goals, produce error-free work and come to you with ideas for more efficient processes.

Keep in mind that positive feedback should be given right away, to encourage more of the same performance. Negative feedback should also be given swiftly so that workers have the opportunity to self-correct. If you can, schedule weekly meetings with individual employees, to provide an opportunity to discuss ongoing projects and issues. These meetings don't have to take a lot of time, and they can build strong working relationships.

8. Build Trust through Respectful Behavior

Use your judgment, wisdom, and experience to create a supportive environment. When problems arise, examine the circumstances, understand the context, and only then make a decision or corrective action. Respect and trust your team and you will get the same in return. If you make a mistake, apologize and admit you were wrong. This will allow your employees to relate to you better, and they will appreciate your honesty.