

You Can Make Their Day: Ten Tips for the Leader About Employee Motivation

Four Tips for the Leader About Employee Motivation

By Susan M. Heathfield, About.com Guide

You can make their day or break their day. Your choice. No kidding. Other than the decisions individuals make on their own about liking their work, you are the most powerful factor in employee motivation and morale.

As a manager or supervisor, your impact on employee motivation is immeasurable. By your words, your body language, and the expression on your face, as a manager, supervisor, or leader, you telegraph your opinion of their value to the people you employ.

Feeling valued by their supervisor in the workplace is key to high employee motivation and morale. Feeling valued ranks right up there for most people with liking the work, competitive pay, opportunities for training and advancement, and feeling "in" on the latest news.

Building high employee motivation and morale is both challenging and yet supremely simple. Building high employee motivation and morale requires that you pay attention every day to profoundly meaningful aspects of your impact on life at work.

Your Arrival at Work Sets the Employee Motivation Tone for the Day

Picture Mr. Stressed-Out and Grumpy. He arrives at work with a frown on his face. His body language telegraphs "over-worked" and unhappy. He moves slowly and treats the first person who approaches him abruptly. It takes only a few minutes for the entire workplace to get the word. Stay away from Mr. Stressed-Out and Grumpy if you know what's good for you this morning.

Your arrival and the first moments you spend with staff each day have an immeasurable impact on positive employee motivation and morale. Start the day right. Smile. Walk tall and confidently. Walk around your workplace and greet people. Share the goals and expectations for the day. Let the staff know that today is going to be a great day. It starts with you. You can make their day.

Use Simple, Powerful Words for Employee Motivation

Sometimes in my work, I get gifts. I recently interviewed an experienced supervisor for a position open at a client company. She indicated that she was popular with the people at her former company as evidenced by employees wanting to work on her shift.

Responding to my question, she said that part of her success was that she liked and appreciated people. She sent the right message. She also uses simple, powerful, motivational words to demonstrate she values people. She says "please" and "thank you" and "you're doing a good job." How often do you take the time to use these simple, powerful words, and others like them, in your interaction with staff? You can make their day.

For Employee Motivation, Make Sure People Know What You Expect

In the best book I've read on the subject, *Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed to Do and What to Do about It* Compare Prices, by Ferdinand Fournies, setting clear expectations is often a

supervisor's first failure. Supervisors think they have clearly stated work objectives, numbers needed, report deadlines and requirements, but the employee received a different message.

Or, the requirements change in the middle of the day, job, or project. While the new expectations are communicated - usually poorly - the reason for the change or the context for the change is rarely discussed. This causes staff members to think that the company leaders don't know what they are doing. This is hardly a confidence, morale-building feeling.

This is bad news for employee motivation and morale. Make sure you get feedback from the employee so you know he understands what you need. Share the goals and reasons for doing the task or project. In a manufacturing environment, don't emphasize just numbers if you want a quality product finished quickly. If you must make a change midway through a task or a project, tell the staff why the change is needed; tell them everything you know. You can make their day.

Provide Regular Feedback for Employee Motivation

When I poll supervisors, the motivation and morale builder they identify first is knowing how they are doing at work. Your staff members need the same information. They want to know when they have done a project well and when you are disappointed in their results. They need this information as soon as possible following the event.

They need to work with you to make sure they produce a positive outcome the next time. Set up a daily or weekly schedule and make sure feedback happens. You'll be surprised how effective this tool can be in building employee motivation and morale. You can make their day.

Here are three more tips for employee motivation at work.

People Need Positive and Not So Positive Consequences

Hand-in-hand with regular feedback, employees need rewards and recognition for positive contributions. One of my clients has started a "thank you" process in which supervisors are recognizing employees with personally written thank you cards and a small gift for work that is above and beyond expectations.

Employees need a fair, consistently administered progressive disciplinary system for when they fail to perform effectively. The motivation and morale of your best-contributing employees is at stake. Nothing hurts positive motivation and morale more quickly than unaddressed problems, or problems addressed inconsistently.

What about supervisory discretion, you are probably thinking. I'm all for supervisory discretion, but only when it is consistent. People need to know what they can expect from you. In employee relations, an apt statement is: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." (attribution unknown) You can make their day.

It Ain't Magic. It's Discipline.

Supervisors frequently ask, "How do I motivate employees?" It's one of the most common questions I am asked. Wrong question. Ask instead, "How do I create a work environment in which individual employees choose to be motivated about work goals and activities?"

That question I can answer. The right answer is that, generally, you know what you should do; you know what motivates you. You just do not consistently, in a disciplined manner, adhere to what you know about employee motivation.

The ten tips, outlined in this article, are the keys to supervisory success in creating positive employee motivation and morale. The challenge is to incorporate them into your skill set and do them consistently - every day. Author, Jim Collins identified disciplined people doing disciplined things every day as one of the hallmarks of companies that went from *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't* Compare Prices. You can make their day.

Continue Learning and Trying Out New Ideas for Employee Motivation

Use whatever access you have to education and training. You may have an internal trainer or you can seek classes from an outside consultant, a training company, or a college or university. If your company offers an educational assistance plan, use all of it.

If not, start talking with your Human Resources professionals about creating one. The ability to continuously learn is what will keep you moving in your career and through all the changes I expect we'll see in the next decade.

Minimally, you will want to learn the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and managers and how to:

- provide feedback,
- provide praise and recognition,
- provide proper progressive discipline,
- give instructions,
- interview and hire superior employees,
- delegate tasks and projects,
- listen actively and deeply,
- write records, letters, file notations, and performance evaluations,
- make presentations,
- manage time,
- plan and execute projects,
- problem solve and follow up for continuous improvement,
- make decisions,
- manage meetings, and
- build empowered teams and individuals in a teamwork environment.

What does all this have to do with employee motivation, you may ask? Everything. The more comfortable and confident you are about these work competencies, the more time, energy, and ability you have to devote to spending time with staff and creating a motivating work environment. You can make their day.

Want more tips? Here are three more tips for employee motivation and positive morale.

Make Time for People for Employee Motivation

Spend time daily with each person you supervise. Managers might aim for an hour a week with each of their direct reports. Many studies indicate that a key employee work motivation factor is spending positive interaction time with the supervisor. Schedule quarterly performance development meetings on a public calendar so people can see when they can expect some quality time and attention from you. You can make their year.

Focus on the Development of People for Employee Motivation

Most people want to learn and grow their skills at work. No matter their reason: a promotion, different work, a new position or a leadership role, employees appreciate your help. Talk about changes they want to make to their jobs to better serve their customers.

Encourage experimentation and taking reasonable risk to develop employee skills. Get to know them personally. Ask what motivates them. Ask what career objectives they have and are aiming to achieve. Make a performance development plan with each person and make sure you help them carry out the plan. The quarterly performance development meeting is your opportunity to formalize plans for people. You can make their career.

Share the Goals and the Context: Communicate for Employee Motivation

People expect you to know the goals and share the direction in which your work group is heading. The more you can tell them about why an event is happening, the better.

Prepare staff in advance if visitors or customers will come to your workplace. Hold regular meetings to share information, gain ideas for improvement, and train new policies. Hold focus groups to gather input before implementing policies that affect employees. Promote problem solving and process improvement teams.

Above all else, to effectively lead a work group, department, or unit, you must take responsibility for your actions, the actions of the people you lead, and the accomplishment of the goals that are yours.

If you are unhappy with the caliber of the people you are hiring, whose responsibility is that? If you are unhappy about the training people in your work group are receiving, whose responsibility is that? If you are tired of sales and accounting changing your goals, schedule, and direction, whose responsibility is that?

If you step up to the wire, people will respect you and follow you. You are creating a work environment in which people will choose motivation. It does start with you. You can make their whole experience with your company.