

Business Bullet ~
Employee Morale
Keep Your Employees Positive Through Business & Economic Change

You have probably heard this quote repeated since the economic downturn a few years ago, "The beatings will continue until morale improves." This is still true, especially in our fast-paced, high-expectation world. Add in any economic downturn (many industries still struggling), delayed raises/bonuses, maybe layoffs, and you've got the perfect recipe for the rapid downward spiral of employee morale. You can survive business re-branding, up and down growth patterns, many of the changes that we all have experienced in the business world, which is in a constant state of flux.

The challenge of employee morale is an ongoing concern. What are some of the ways to transition employee morale from negativity, martyrdom and cynicism to energy, enthusiasm and productivity. Here are some lessons from in the trench on salvaging the spirit of your work force.

Add in a little fun and togetherness. Sometimes, wasting time can be the best remedy for a lack of productivity. Ironically, decreasing pressure you put on employees to 'get back to work' can translate into a more productive workforce. Particularly if work is a little slow, take half the time you'd otherwise use stressing about the lull and apply it to something fun and not necessarily work-related. One of my clients has a yearly picnic, which has proven to reignite a sense of internal camaraderie and company pride—two things that can do wonders for employee morale.

Make it personal. No one likes to feel like "Employee #20." But in the normal course of doing business, they can be made to feel like that. Make a point to publicly recognize examples of work well done and give specific kudos to those who made it all possible. A brief company-wide e-mail or a personal thank-you cupcake can do wonders.

Share the road map for the future of the company. Sharing your business vision for the future helps provide employees with a sense of security and purpose, and allows them to envision through your company's give-year business plan (or whatever sort of plan you might have in place.) This will make them feel engaged and more likely to become ambassadors of that plan versus complacent toward it. Though it sounds like internal communications 101, we often forget to practice what we preach.

Let the prisoners run the prison. Strange wording, but what it means is share some power with employees. I'm not saying you need to consult with them on major decisions impacting the company. But when you surrender some control, you allow employees to take more ownership of how the company functions.

Back to basics: keep your door open. Not only figuratively, but literally. Nothing deflates employee morale more than seeing the office doors of upper management closed for hours on end. Speculation starts. Rumors ignite. You get the drift.

Create the opportunity to 'do good'. Nothing makes you feel better than helping someone else, so give employees the chance to volunteer or otherwise give back...on your watch. Some companies have a 'blue jean Friday' and give the monies collected to a local charity. Some companies form a team for a local Walk for a charity. This builds internal camaraderie and pride, as do some of these other ideas I'm sharing with you.

Install a venue for employee communication and bonding. Whether this is a potluck or a blog with commenting functionality, consider creating a medium for employees to interact and connect, ultimately creating a sense of community. Participate in the dialogue—you can learn a lot about the state of morale by simply piping in now and again.

(continues on page 2)

Build in some structure. When things are tough and people feel a sense of hopelessness, that dread can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Make sure there is a sense of structure to the day-in and day-out efforts of your staff, and that standard reporting, procedures, etc., are maintained. Though this might sound remedial, it gives people a sense of purpose and belonging.

Encourage cross-training. Create the chance for employees to learn tips and skills from people who do something different from themselves within your organization. This can sometimes reenergize an employee and, in many cases, allows them to gain new skills that help them with their core job. Similarly, make sure that management is in the habit of inviting more junior team members to planning/strategy sessions (when appropriate). Ask for their input—you never know where a good idea might come from. Even if they don't contribute, it's still great to feel a part of the team.

And remember, now is not the time to change for change's sake. When employee morale—and consequently, productivity—is low, it's not the time for unnecessary changes, like those to a benefits plan, office hours, teams, etc. This runs the risk of causing a ripple in an employee's sense of security and for their foundation to be rocked even more.

Many of these ideas/suggestions are from colleagues of mine in the marketing and communications field. When we are helping our clients with these types of suggested positive changes, we then find that we have incorporated into our own businesses. A good practice overall.

Information provided for you by ~

Marilyn K. Dayton, Business/Marketing Specialist

<http://www.marketingandbizpro.com> ~ marilyn@marketingandbizpro.com

860-389-2521

