

Motivating and Retaining Quality Employees

by Steve Keating

Want to motivate your employees? I believe that one of the most effective ways to motivate people is to fire them! Not really fire them, just fire them up.

Almost every business manager agrees that their most valuable asset is their employees. No one in a leadership position, whether they are a leader in sports, politics, a profession or business can succeed without committed, quality employees. Yet, on any given day, in the heat of the battle, it is easy to overlook that most valuable asset and just manage "stuff" or to put out the inevitable fires. We leave that most valuable asset to fend for itself and often suffer serious consequences as a result.

President Eisenhower said, "The urgent is seldom important and the important is seldom urgent." Think about that; is what you do each minute of everyday the most important task you have to accomplish or just the most urgent? Successful leaders know the difference and work hard to ensure that the majority of their time is spent on the truly important tasks, such as motivating and retaining quality employees.

We all know how difficult it can be to find quality employees but the satisfaction we feel when we add an excellent employee to the team makes it worth the effort. Then just as they begin to produce for us, they're gone. That very expensive and time-consuming cycle begins again, and again and yet again. The good news is that there are concrete actions that we as leaders can take to break this cycle once and for all. I believe that the first step to break this cycle is to recognize the importance of motivating our employees everyday, on our good days and bad, even on their good days and bad.

"something" in them that made us believe they could be an asset to our team. Look for that "something" everyday. Let them know continually, sincerely how important they are to you. Our organization is only as strong as its weakest link and we can't afford any weak links.

Look for what's right today

The average person has 40,000 thoughts a day. For the average person who would call themselves a positive person, 80 percent of those thoughts are negative in some way. When we look at our people it is vital that we look for the good, that we look for what they are doing right and not just what they may have done wrong.

A good example of this would be a little boy playing baseball all by himself in his front yard. With no one else to play with he just throws the ball in the air and tries to hit it with his bat. Unsuccessful on his first two attempts he throws the ball up a third time; once again he misses it completely. At this point his mother calls him in for dinner and as he picks up his ball and begins to walk into the house he says to himself, "Wow, what a great pitcher." Can you be like that little boy and find the positive in any situation?

If we can't then how can we expect our employees to remain positive when they are challenged?

Let's take a look at some of those daily actions for motivating quality employees.

We need to highly value all employees

When we hired the employee we saw

Reward correct actions

A recent survey conducted by Robert Half International shows that the primary reason people leave jobs today is limited recognition. Somewhat surprisingly, this is true for all categories of workers, from the career minded individual to those just working day to day. If we are going to look for what's right then when we find it we need to share it. Regular recognition is one of the best ways to motivate employees. That



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recognition can take on many forms, from a simple "atta boy" to a written note. Never underestimate the power of the written word, the time it takes to write out a note might just be the most productive thing you did that day.

The key to successful recognition is to be sincere, remember your not just talking to just anybody here; this person is vitally important to your success and is your most valuable asset. If we manage employees whose first language is not English then learning a little of their language can be very helpful and also demonstrates their importance to us. If possible, recognize them in their first language.

Walk your enthusiastic talk

Do as I say, not as I do? Sorry, that doesn't get it done. Just as we watch our employees, they watch us. If we want motivated, enthusiastic employees then we must be motivated and enthusiastic ourselves. Enthusiasm is contagious; Dale Carnegie used to say,

"Enthusiasm is the little recognized secret to success."

When customers tour The Toro Company's manufacturing facilities they often remark about the enthusiasm of the people who assemble our products, and it's true, they are an amazing group of dedicated folks. But that type of enthusiasm does not happen by accident, to make a superior product takes superior people and the leaders work daily to ensure their people stay motivated. Long-term success demands that we do the same, keep ourselves enthusiastic and model the behavior that we want from our employees everyday.

Keep people informed and answer all questions

Most managers hate rumors. Rumors cause all kinds of problems: Lost productivity, low morale and even turnover. Information is the enemy of rumor! If we want motivated employees then we need to keep them as informed as possible. There

is no question that every organization has trade secrets and that some information, such as personnel records, should be kept private, but too many companies and managers withhold information from their team just because they can.

We use information as a power source instead of using it to empower and motivate our people. We assume and act as if information is only for the "important" people in our organization or that too much information will start rumors. I repeat, information is the enemy of rumor. Meet with your team often; if there is no information to share tell them so, don't just ignore them. If someone has a question that you can't answer, find the answer and get back to them; if the question was asked in front of the group, then get back to the group with the answer.

Communicate one on one

Do you know who works for you? I

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don't mean just their names, I mean really know them. If we are going to be successful in motivating our people then we need to know what motivates them. We can't do that without understanding them and getting to know what makes the person who they are, how they make decisions and what types of goals they may have. How much sense does it make for us to decide what will motivate someone else?

We have probably all heard that the best way to manage a team of people is to treat everyone the same. Makes sense right? No favorites here! Maybe we should re-think that. After the Dallas Cowboys had won their first Super Bowl under Jimmy Johnson, he was asked about his secret for keeping his team motivated during the ups and downs of a long season. His answer was that he treated each player differently. He reasoned that since they were all different, it would be very ineffective to treat them all the same. His results speak volumes about his methods.

Periodically "inner-view" your employees. No, that is not a typo, I am suggesting that you get the "inner" view of your team so that you can motivate each employee differently. If you want to know exactly what motivates a particular employee, then make that one of your "inner" view questions.

Coach, coach, coach

Coach constantly; coach when they do "it" right and when they don't. Coach every time you see an opportunity, as soon as you see the opportunity. If you are going to coach for corrective action then you need to wait for a private moment, but coach as soon as you can. Begin with something they are doing right and make the fault seem easy to correct. If you are going to coach to reinforce some positive behavior then go ahead and do it publicly, it will double as recognition.

If you are going to use a compliment then remember that a true compliment has two parts, the compliment and evidence to support why

you said it. For example, I might say nice job to an employee who has done a good job raking an infield. That's an okay bit of recognition, but when I say nice job and then tell them that I used to rake infields and know how tough a job it can be, it adds more weight to my compliment. Challenge people when coaching, give them a fine reputation to live up to and they will seldom let you down.

One last bit of advice on motivating quality employees: Motivating should become a habit. It should be as normal as putting on shoes in the morning. Use the ideas that we discussed above for 21 days and they just might turn out to be a habit for you. One trait that all successful people have in common is that they have developed the habit of doing things that less successful people don't like to do. Will you be successful in motivating your employees? The answer is in your hands.

Steve Keating is the sales training manager for The Toro Company's Commercial Equipment Division headquartered in Bloomington, Minn.

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