Motivating your employees

When many employees leave a job, they most often do so to get away from their manager, not necessarily the practice in general. Many managers enter their position with little or no experience in their job duties, which include goal-setting, work planning, delegation, coaching, hiring, managing performance, promotions, giving feedback, managing conflict and, more importantly, motivation.

Managers who take on these extremely important jobs, which will have a huge impact on the success of the practice and the people who work for them, must quickly become adept at skills they've never practiced and may not have been trained to do.

Managers who truly know how to motivate their staff to superior performance excel at the so-called “soft skills” that make people feel good and self-fulfilled in their position to the point that they push themselves to levels they hadn't even believed themselves capable of. The true motivators, when used correctly by managers, cost little or no money, but therefore are even more valuable.

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Being a good manager or supervisor isn’t just a popularity contest. It’s the opposite. The supervisor, who wants to be an employee's buddy, overlooks failings or minor offenses and is afraid to lose the friendship of the people whose leadership has been entrusted to him or her soon loses the respect of the very people he or she is trying to win over. Just being “nice” doesn’t make anyone the manager everyone wants to work for.

Nothing is more frustrating to employees as having a manager who will not or cannot clearly communicate goals and expectations. When people can be heard to exclaim: “I don’t know what my boss wants from me anymore!” the team is usually in trouble. People will feel most well-adjusted at work when they understand clearly what tasks are to be accomplished, what each person’s expected role is and when those expectations are seen as reasonable (i.e., not too easy and not impossible, either).

Some inexperienced managers, usually out of sense of insecurity, keep changing the rules of the game on their employees to keep them constantly off-guard. They usually learn the hard way that such a practice only creates frustrated staff who will soon start doing the minimum possible — or they’ll just leave. To convey the message that “you have violated one of my rules but I won’t tell you what that rule is” puts employees in a world that good people will not tolerate.

Motivation is mostly about positive reinforcement, such as recognition, rewards, praise, appreciation, caring and making it fun. Of course, managers need to give corrective feedback from time to time to change behavior harmful to the practice and the team. It is generally best to keep such feedback in terms of coaching rather than punishment. Managers may be angry at the person for displaying the behavior that needs to be corrected, but a display of anger usually results in escalation. It is better to cool off for a moment, consider what a desirable outcome is and approach the employee in a calmer state of mind.

Corrective feedback should always be given in a private place — no one likes to receive criticism in public—and should be specific, related only to the behavior that needs change. Corrective feedback should also focus on things that the employee can actually change, such as behavior and events. Never generalize or make it about character traits: “You’re always too argumentative, and you’re too slow, too.”

If a manager plays favorites with his or her subordinates, basing that favoritism on whom he or she likes rather than on who produces, people can be expected to lie and present false faces so the manager will like them, too, rather than judge them on the merits of their work. To remain a viable practice, each practice must apply as much time, energy and person-power to the business it conducts. It must spend resources maintaining an environment where people feel authentically motivated to produce, sell or whatever it is they were hired to do.