

Motivate Your Team

Five Ways to Stimulate Productivity and Enthusiasm

By Debra Hamilton

A team member's performance is a product of both the ability to do the work and the motivation to do it. High performers are usually very competent and highly motivated. On the other hand, low performers are often competent but lack motivation. Are people motivated by their environment or does motivation come from within? More important, how skilled is the team leader in managing the team dynamics and boosting morale?

People are motivated from both internal and external sources. For example, an employee may willingly accept a new responsibility and be motivated by the challenge it offers only to quickly lose the motivation through lack of recognition, poor communication, or loss of trust. As such, team leaders have the power to create an environment that provides external motivators such as: providing recognition, showing respect, building positive relationships, and having fun. On the other hand, team leaders who lack enthusiasm have the power to sabotage the work climate. A proactive team leader will routinely assess the team dynamics, engage the team, and create synergy that would otherwise not be possible. Here are five easy ways to get started.

1. Be an encouraging team leader. One of the basic human needs is to be understood and appreciated. So appreciation ranks high as a powerful motivational tool, and it can be delivered in the form of verbal or written praise that is clear, specific, and timely. Give praise and encouragement daily—don't wait until employees do something extraordinary to acknowledge their contributions. Good work that gets recognized gets repeated.

2. Treat team members like clients. Salespeople spend a great deal of effort providing value to customers. Team leaders can do the same with their internal customers. Motivate your team members by treating them like valued customers. Collect information about your employees—hobbies, interests, values—and use it to offer tailored, personalized rewards. This technique has been coined "one-to-one management" and shows that you genuinely value employees as the unique individuals they are.

3. Share the limelight. Write a letter of praise to recognize the team's specific contributions and accomplishments. Send copies to your boss and the human resources department. Make sure the letter goes into the recipient's personnel file. In addition, invite your boss to attend a meeting with your team during which you share the limelight.

4. Provide rewards and morale boosters. Fun can be a great motivator. Reward your team with a pizza party, social event, flex-time, a contest, games, incentives, and small gifts. Put your imagination and creativity to work.

5. Provide more challenging opportunities. Use open communication to delegate assignments and connect assignments to higher levels of empowerment and visibility. Allow team members the freedom to complete tasks in their own way with checkpoints. Involve the team in brainstorming, problem solving, and decision making. High levels of involvement lead to commitment and increased levels of trust and motivation.

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