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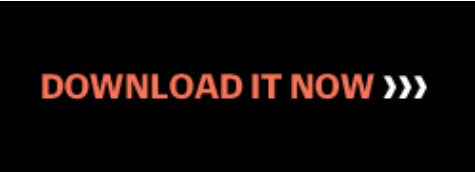
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The Employee-Motivation Checklist

By Dave Lavinsky

|

November 13, 2012

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Of course you want employees who are happy, motivated, and productive--who doesn't? Following each of these simple steps will get you where you want to be.

Great leaders make all the difference.

In business, we see the impact of great leaders such as Tony Hsieh, who took the helm of online shoe retailer Zappos.com from founder Nick Swinmurn. Under Hsieh's leadership, the company grew from $1.6 million in sales in 2000 to more than $1 billion in sales in 2009.

Through many years of research, trial and error, and working with companies of all sizes in numerous industries, I have identified 16 critical ways to motivate your employees. Learn these techniques and adapt as many as possible in your business.

1. Make employees feel they are doing something meaningful.

A recent survey by BNET (which is now part of CBS MoneyWatch) asked the question, "What motivates you at work?"

The results showed that doing something meaningful is more important than money or recognition to your employees. Twenty nine percent of respondents said that doing something meaningful was the most motivating thing about work. Money motivated 25 percent, and recognition 17 percent.

Therefore, the number one way to motivate your employees is to make them feel that they are doing something meaningful. Now, if your vision is to alleviate poverty, as Kiva's is, getting your employees to feel like they are doing something meaningful is pretty easy. This might not seem quite as simple for the typical for-profit company. But this, too, is relatively straightforward. Establishing your company's vision and goals--particularly involving your employees in creating them--will motivate them to achieve these objectives and help them feel that they are doing something meaningful.

2. Effectively communicate and share information.

You also must consistently share new information to ensure that your employees make good decisions.

You must always let employees know how the organization is progressing toward achieving goals. Setting KPIs

and posting the associated KPI results monthly will allow you to achieve this.

3. Give employees clear job descriptions and accountability.

It is critical that you give each of your employees clear job descriptions and accountability. It's not enough to just state each role's responsibilities; rather, you must specify the expected results and tasks. For example, the customer service manager's described role might be to handle all inbound customer service calls. Their expected results, however, might be to answer all calls within 15 seconds or less, resulting in 90 percent customer satisfaction in telephone follow-up service. Only by specifying roles and expected results and accountability can you get what you want from each employee.

4. Give and receive ongoing performance feedback.

When things do go wrong, don't blame. You want to replace who questions with how questions. For example, rather than saying, "Who screwed this up?" say, "How could we improve this process or avoid this in the future?"

5. Have--and show--faith and trust in your team.

Most humans have relatively fragile self-esteem. If you don't believe your employees can do something, they won't believe they can either, and they won't do it. You must have faith in them. You can't just say you have faith: you need to show you do to enhance their confidence in their ability.

To achieve this, give your employees some autonomy to make decisions. Let them take ownership of challenging projects and decide how to complete them. Although it can be a challenge for almost any manager, you must let them fail sometimes and not get angry about it.

6. Listen to, focus on, and respect your employees' needs.

You've likely heard this before, but it's worth repeating that in leadership, listening is more important than speaking. I love this quote: "Questions unite. Answers divide." Asking questions of your team will get them to participate; dictating the answers will cause them to tune out.

7. Provide recognition to worthy employees.

Recognition is an amazing motivator. Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton authored a book called The Carrot Principle in which they discuss a study of more than 200,000 employees that they conducted over a 10-year period. The study showed that the most successful managers provided their employees with frequent and effective recognition. In fact, they found that managers realized significantly better business results when they offered employees recognition in the form of constructive praise rather than monetary rewards.

8. Provide fair compensation and pay for the performance you seek.

First, you must pay a wage that employees believe is fair compensation. Second, you must pay for performance whenever possible. This does not mean 100 percent contingent compensation. It means that you set expectations for base pay while also providing bonuses and clearly defining success. This will compel employees to strive to achieve the goals you have outlined.

9. Foster innovation.

Managers must realize that the vast majority of innovations come from frontline employees. They come from the people who are manufacturing your products or designing your services, who are interfacing with customers, and who are solving problems on a daily basis. As such, innovation must be encouraged.

10. Establish fair company policies that support the company's goals.

Developing fair company policies that adequately support the company's goals will motivate your employees even more. For example, you cannot treat attending a seminar as a personal day if you want to encourage continuous learning. Rather, ensure your policies and practices encourage employee feedback, collaboration, decision-making, and so on.

11. Get ongoing input from employees.

You want to invite your employees to help set goals so that they really buy into them. Seek employee input on key decisions and plans on an ongoing basis.

Understand that as the leader, you will make the ultimate decisions and plans. Even if you don't follow your employees' advice or take their suggestions verbatim, however, the very act of soliciting their feedback will give you more information and ideas and will make them feel involved.

12. Manage, but don't micromanage.

Employees do not like to be micromanaged. It's disempowering. It's therefore important to distinguish the difference between checking in and checking up on your employees.

Likewise, when managing, don't dictate every detail of how to complete a project. Remember, employees can't grow and gain new skills if you're telling them exactly what to do for every project they work on. They need a sense of autonomy to feel that they're succeeding.

13. Encourage teamwork.

Most projects you complete will require input from several employees within your organization. Encourage these employees to work as a team rather than a collection of individuals to complete these projects. The easiest way to do this is to set up an initial meeting for the team, refer to them as a team, and give them enough autonomy so they act like a team.

14. Modify your management approach for different types of employees.

Great leaders let the employees they're managing dictate the management approaches they use. Some employees may need or desire more handholding and coaching, whereas others will want or require less. It's important to think about each key employee and determine the best way to lead him or her.

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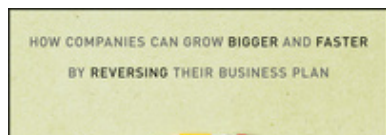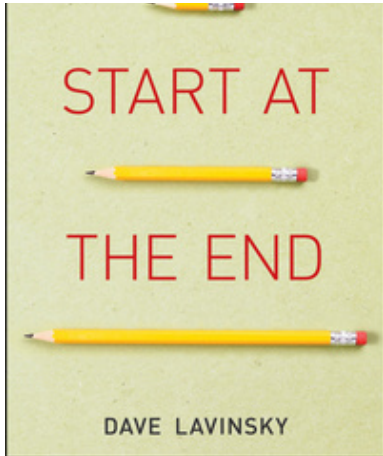
15. Give employees opportunities for personal growth.

Because people who get the chance to grow their skills and expertise take more pride in their jobs, you want to encourage employees in your organization to gain new skills. You can do this in many ways, such as providing on-the-job training and other opportunities to teach your employees new skills.
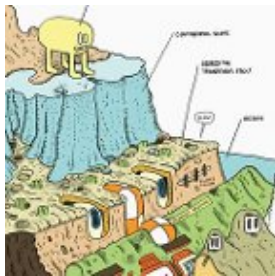
16. Fire people when needed.

The final technique for motivating your team is to fire people when needed. Underperformers can kill an organization; they can become cancers. When other employees see these individuals getting away with underperformance, then they start to underperform. Therefore, firing--as long as you explain to your team why people were fired--can actually motivate your employees.

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Author Dave Lavinsky is the cofounder of *Growthink*, a consultancy that helps entrepreneurs and business owners identify and pursue new opportunities, develop new business plans, raise capital, and build growth strategies.

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Nathan Zeldes

As to firing people as a motivator: in addition to removing under-performers, there's another scenario: fire managers who hurt their subordinates. Managers who are unfair, inconsiderate, obnoxious, selfish and so forth are not a rarity, but firing one for no other reason than that you consider such behavior unacceptable sends a powerful message. It marks the organization as one worthy of loyalty. Been there, seen it in action...

Yesterday 07:00 AM   4 Likes   Like   Reply

Robert Gately, I show employers how to hire successful employees.

Nathan, I could not agree more. My only addition would be to provide ineffective managers with coaching, training, mentoring, etc., until one thing becomes crystal clear, the manager will not improve his job performance; then find them another job either in or out of the company.

Yesterday 12:01 PM   in reply to Nathan Zeldes   Like   Reply

Robert Gately, I show employers how to hire successful employees.

Hello Dave, thanks for the article. I suggest we add one more item to the beginning of the list since this one new item makes all the other 16 items easier to accomplish.

0. Hire competent employees who also have an adequate or better job suitability, i.e., they have the talent for job success.

Yesterday 12:06 PM   1 Like   Like   Reply

leszekkn

I think the list makes a good starter. But also I do have to agree with Lisa about the targeted recruiting - in my opinion, finding great people whose values align with yours is the basics.

11/13/2012 11:04 AM   1 Like   Like   Reply

Lisa Sansom

This is sort of a "motherhood and apple pie" list, isn't it? I don't see anything new here. And the first tip is feeling a little cynical. Sort of like the employer is saying "Our work and purpose don't really mean anything at all, but with clever words and promotions, we can con our employees into feeling that their work counts for something." What about doing truly meaningful work and/or doing targeted recruiting such that you get employees who truly value that work?

11/13/2012 09:39 AM   1 Like   Like   Reply

Dave Lavinsky

Lisa,

Thanks for your comment. Good points. But please allow me to explain further....

I'm not saying that companies should make up a reason why their work is meaningful. Rather, they should figure out how to make it more meaningful to their employees. For example, if we manufacture toilet paper, that's hardly an inspiring mission. But if we set a goal to increase production by 20% and get employees to understand they are the key to achieving this goal, they will start to find their work more meaningful as they work to accomplish the goal (they will come to work each day with the mission of increasing production 20%).

With regards to your comment and Leszek's about doing targeted recruiting, I totally agree. That's a given. You need great people. But getting them is not enough. Once you get them, you need to constantly motivate them.

The final thing I'd like to add is that no, there isn't anything new here. There is no wiz-bang management technique. Rather this is more of a checklist that every manager should use to

constantly remind them of all the things they could be doing better to improve their team's productivity and results.

11/13/2012 02:10 PM   in reply to Lisa Sansom   3 Likes   Like   Reply

Tony Hogeveen

You are 100% right Lisa. You can't make them think it is meaningful. People do what they do because what they do is meaningful to them, even if that is making toilet paper. What the company does with their skills and abilities is what will make it meaningful. Does the company allow good people to make the most of their skills? Does the company allow people to contribute their own ideas to make things better? If a person has been making toilet paper for 15 years and has a lot of great ideas about how to make it better, faster, cheaper, etc, but no-one listens, then the job will cease to have meaning. Glory and world recognition doesn't make a job meaningful, being good at your job and being in an environment where you can be your best and see that your contributions make a big difference is what makes a job meaningful. We should conduct a survery about what makes a job meaningful to a person. Not focused on what they do every day, but what about themselves and what they would like to contribute would make it meaningful for them.

Today 09:57 AM   in reply to Lisa Sansom   Like   Reply

Spark Hire

These are all great tips on how to motivate your employees and keep them motivated. You want employees who are adding real value and innovation to your company, not office drones. Another great thing to consider is to focus on employee motivation as early as the hiring process. Whether your interview is in person or through online video, it's important to make sure you hire workers who are passionate about the job and will fit into the organizational culture.

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Christina Damiano

Dead on!
Motivation --> Productivity --> Profit
These are 16 great techniques, most of which are just common sense, but all too often not common practice.
Thanks for the article Dave!

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Christina Damiano

Dead on!
Motivation --> Productivity --> Profit
These are 16 great techniques, most of which are just common sense, but all too often not common practice.
Thanks for the article Dave!

Yesterday 08:35 AM   Like   Reply

KarenEichman

As an employment attorney, I would tread carefully with "explain to your team why people were fired." As a manager, you owe to the organization and its employees (current and former) discretion and confidentiality.

Yesterday 07:50 AM   Like   Reply

Cboyt

Worth a review of these basic principles. They work and people want to work for you.

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