

Building Employee Morale One Step at a Time

By Doug Hauff

Recently, a marketing consultant visited our office and factory in Coeur d'Alene, ID where we make our carpet extractors and restoration equipment. As we do with most first-time visitors, we gave him a tour of our facility to provide a better idea of who we are, how we do things, and our product line. We are accustomed to receiving compliments on our office operation, but this visitor apparently looked deeper, commenting several times how he could “feel” the business is well run. He said he detected a real camaraderie and a happy and high comfort level among our staff and with the company.



While grateful for the comments, we know this atmosphere where people like to do their jobs and enjoy coming to work does not happen by chance. And it certainly is not just the result of good pay and benefits, although these definitely help. Instead, good employee morale is often the result of a variety of factors, working together to produce a contented, motivated, and productive workplace.

Promoting Morale

A high level of morale is essential for a company to succeed, especially today, when we are competing not only with manufacturers throughout North America and Europe, but also with very productive companies in India, China, and around the world. As Admiral Ernest J. King, a celebrated World War II Navy leader once said: “Machines are nothing without men. Men are nothing without morale. It [morale] is a state of mind where there is confidence, courage, and a zeal among people united in a common effort to succeed.”

Leading companies are constantly looking for ways to elevate morale and managers and supervisors, office personnel, and others who can accomplish this are highly valued. Below are some suggestions for enhancing employee morale that we have learned through our own experience. Of course, your results may vary depending on many factors, including how effective your managers are. Also keep in mind that using several of these suggestions in tandem can help improve results and that to be truly effective, your efforts should be ongoing.

Communicate fully. We have made several operational changes to our factory over the years, such as the installation of new equipment, or introducing new ways to carry out tasks and duties. Don't hold back on information. Explain fully why things are being changed and how it will affect employees. Asking people to accept new equipment and/or change their work patterns blindly is often met with resistance. Fully explaining why new equipment is being installed or why we are changing traditional work plans helps employees understand the motivations and goals behind the change.

Listen to employees: Early on, especially in the factory, we realized that our workers often are aware of different ways to do their jobs more productively, but were frequently held back from offering their suggestions because they believed they were simply “to do as told.” Communication is not a one-way street. Sometimes top managers grow out of touch with how things really function in other departments or in the factory. Encourage employees to come forward with suggestions.

Respond to suggestions and problems promptly. Along with listening to employees, it is important to respond to their suggestions and problems promptly. If an employee suggestion is not accepted, let the worker know why but always express gratefulness for the suggestion. This will help encourage more suggestions in the future, some that may be very helpful to the company. The same is true of problems. Never overlook this sort of feedback. Doing so creates frustration and demoralizes workers—not to mention the detrimental effect ignoring a potentially serious problem can have on the company.

Offer praise and recognition. Several studies on what improves employee morale have been conducted over the years that have come to similar conclusions regarding the importance of praise and recognition in the workplace. Contrary to what many employers might think, money is *not* the most important motivator in raising employee morale. In fact, on a scale of one to 10, it usually ranks

about 5 in most of these studies. What usually ranks first when it comes to raising employee morale is praise and recognition. People like to hear they have done a good job and are appreciated. The only qualifier here: be sincere.

Set an example. The mood, morale, and direction of a company always starts at the top, with the leaders of the company. These attitudes become internalized by company workers, who then adopt similar behaviors and attitudes. It is crucial for managers, supervisors, and the top executives in a company to acknowledge this leadership role and always conduct themselves in a positive and considerate manner.

The Pay Off

As with cultivating any good, long-term relationship, your efforts to improve employee morale must be ongoing. Once steps have been taken, you must implement ongoing measures to maintain it. One way to do this is to get employees more involved in the company. For example: turning top employees into part-time trainers. We have found that when a worker is asked to become a trainer, that person becomes a role model to other employees. The selected worker feels more connected to the company and its operation, and this spills over to the employees being trained. This not only improves work quality and productivity, but also frees supervisors and managers to carry out other duties.

Another good motivator to get employees directly involved in company endeavors, you might, for instance, create small committees of employees to help develop department and company goals regarding safety, efficiency, productivity, and improving employee relations. Stakeholders in an operation usually have much more enthusiasm for their company and their jobs, which helps maintain better employee morale.

Reward and Award

One often overlooked morale booster is when the company is recognized for accomplishing a major goal in which employees played a significant role. For instance, when our company was honored with the Carpet and Rug Institute's Seal of Approval for nine of our carpet extractors, there was a great round of cheer and joy in our office.

And when we realized ours were the first portables receiving this designation, excitement reached an even greater crescendo. But, what has happened since the announcement is even more gratifying. Employee enthusiasm for our products and pride in the company has all reached an all-time high.

It's been said that nothing succeeds like success. But success can not happen unless a company takes the steps and makes the commitment to improve employee morale. Empower your employees. Make it known they are important to the company, that each member of the organization plays a role in the success and accomplishments of the company. Help them "own" their outcomes, to be proud of their work, and the company where they perform it,

and realize each person plays a vital role in how well a company performs and succeeds.

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