

Hanging on by a Thread? How You Can Help

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.” It sounds like sage advice. However, many people working in customer support will point out that they have been doing that for quite a while. They wonder how much longer they can hang on.

Doing jobs once done by four other people or facing abusive and demanding customers on a daily basis does take a toll. In fact, when long time Jet Blue flight attendant, Steven Slater, had enough with an uncooperative traveler, he announced he quit over the loud speaker, grabbed a cold beer, opened the plane’s escape hatch and made a dramatic exit. Rather than allowing your direct reports to have a meltdown like Slater, here are some suggestions for managers and supervisors given the current economic crisis.

So what are those things?

1. **Be visible.** Walk the floors and be out there with your employees. Don’t hole up in your office doing paper work. Accessibility is critical. It will demonstrate solidarity, that you are one of them.
2. **Connect with your team.** Get to know your direct reports on a personal level. Inquire about their families, weekends or vacations. Share who you are. Don’t be afraid to tell them about your personal interests. The more they know you, the more they won’t want to disappoint.
3. **Show your people you care.** Applaud their extra efforts. Let them know what you like about what they are doing. Bring in doughnuts or pizza. Have campaigns with small prizes for performance. A free lunch and a public acknowledgement go a long way with even the most demoralized employee.

4. **Ask for feedback.** Find out what is or isn’t working about processes or procedures. Take the valid suggestions to senior management. Actively try to fix what is within your realm.
5. **Provide training.** One of the most annoying parts of anyone’s job is feeling insecure about how to do something or who to approach when there are issues. With the appropriate training, employees will feel confident that they can tackle any job. Find out what people feel would help them improve the way they do their jobs. Some training can be done through “lunch and learns” or e-learning, but others need to be hands on. The investment you make in your people will pay off tenfold.
6. **Communicate often.** Some bosses or managers say nothing about potential changes. By not talking about these impending changes, the rumor mill takes over. It is easier to accept reality than it is to fantasize about what might happen.
7. **Be honest.** Have integrity. Do not lie. When there are company changes, tell people what you can share and nothing more. Do not make promises you cannot keep or mislead people. People will appreciate your truthfulness.

Today’s work force feels unbelievable pressure. They are holding on by a thread. As managers and supervisors, you need to proactively support your team in any way that you can.

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