

Motivating the Team When Times are Tough

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Everywhere you go people are talking about the economy and its effect on them personally. On a recent business flight, the person sitting next to me mentioned that seven members of her family are out of work. At my aunt's 90th birthday party last week, the conversation quickly shifted from pleasantries to the dire straights of the job market. At my own dinner table, our family of four frequently discusses their concerns about job security. It doesn't matter where you go; people in the workforce are worried. The conundrum that managers and supervisors are in is how to keep their teams motivated. There are five important things to communicate.

1. **I value your extra efforts.** People who feel appreciated are more positive about their jobs and their ability to contribute. They work harder when someone notices. What that means is that supervisors and managers need to get out of their offices and pay attention. When they notice someone doing something extra, they need to praise them as publicly as possible. *"Wow, Jack! You must have been on that call for three hours. I know your shift ended two hours ago. You never once sounded like you were rushing. I am sure the customer was very appreciative of your help and has a positive feeling about our company as a result. Thanks a lot."*

In praising employees, be sure to be as specific as possible. Instead of "great job," describe what they did that was worth noting. Everyone likes to be noticed so in looking to praise your employees, remember little things count. Recognizing only the highest performer in the bunch or the person accomplishing a Herculean task will defeat your purpose. *"Hey, Mary! This snowstorm made a lot of people late. You, Carlos, Mike and Silvia were here on time. Thanks for leaving*

home early. It means the callers won't be in cue as long."

2. **I am aware of your performance.** In tough times, people are always worried about how they are doing. While your company may have a formal review process once a year, there are many informal opportunities to provide feedback. The wise manager provides feedback often, even on a weekly basis. That way if there is anything that needs correcting or refining, the individual has the opportunity to do so before the annual written review. There are no surprises. Informal feedback demonstrates to the employee that you are paying attention.
3. **I want to help you to grow.** One of the biggest complaints of employees is that their job is stifling; they do the same boring thing day in and day out. Managers who are motivating create employee development plans and then insure that they follow through on their commitments- even in tough times. They look for growth opportunities for their people through seminars, workshops, company meetings or cross training. Employees who receive learning opportunities are noticeably more enthusiastic and eager to try new ideas.
4. **Here is what I expect.** It is very frustrating to not know what is expected in these difficult times. No one intentionally wants to do a bad job, but often managers and supervisors are too busy to be clear about setting expectations regarding policies and procedures. Many don't want to be perceived as the "bad guy." Being clear and direct helps people to prioritize and stay in control of their required tasks.
5. **I trust you.** People who feel empowered are more satisfied and productive. It is important for the manager and supervisor to look for

ways to empower their staff. The manager who micromanages and needs to approve everything demoralizes and engenders resentment. Who will wants to play policeman anyway.

Motivating employees in troubled times is hard. But the more you communicate your support and encouragement, the harder the individual works at supporting their own customers. Contented customers stay loyal and buy more, keeping your staff and you employed.

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