

Motivating your employees

Money isn't the answer

BY MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

Intrinsic motivators such as recognition for achievement, growth and advancement are the determining factors in keeping qualified employees.



So you're having trouble keeping your employees? And the ones you can keep, you have trouble inspiring and motivating? After all, in your industry, it can be a challenge. Often, your business is seasonal, with long hours. Many of your employees are young and have a different work ethic from when you grew up. And to remain competitive, you can't keep hiking wages.

Believe it or not, money isn't as important as you might think. Sure, you need to pay your employees fairly and competitively.

For example, if your business is retail, and people working in retail shops in your area of the country are paid on average \$10-\$12 per hour, you won't be able to get away with paying your employees \$8 per hour. Similarly, if employees at your landscaping company are paid \$12 an hour, but competitors in your city pay \$15-\$20, then you won't keep your employees for very long. But once you pay competitively, it's not the wages that keep your employees going above and beyond every day, it's something else. And interestingly enough, even if you

paid your employees more than the average in your region, you still wouldn't keep them motivated on an ongoing and sustainable basis. You see, money isn't a motivator!

MONEY ISN'T A MOTIVATOR

Many of you won't accept that right away, but let me explain by rephrasing: money isn't a motivator *but* lack of money is a *de-motivator*. To understand this statement, we need to look at a classic study conducted by Frederick Herzberg in 1968, which was subsequently revalidated

in 2003 (*Harvard Business Review*). In his research, Herzberg discovered that the factors that produced job satisfaction were separate and distinct from those that led to job dissatisfaction. In other words, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not opposites of each other. Instead, the opposite of job satisfaction is *no* job satisfaction; and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is *no* job dissatisfaction (see diagram). He called the factors that led to job satisfaction *intrinsic factors* (or *motivators*)

and those that led to unhappiness on the job *extrinsic factors* (or *de-motivators*). Herzberg went on to identify some of the intrinsic factors in employee motivation as achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, growth, and advancement; and some of the extrinsic factors as company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security. Notice that salary is an extrinsic factor, so according to Herzberg's

research, poor wages will result in job dissatisfaction, but reasonable wages can only achieve *no* job dissatisfaction. To achieve job satisfaction, you need to focus on the intrinsic factors.

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

So, as a business owner, how can you use this information to keep your employees enthused and motivated? There are two things to consider.

First, realize that the extrinsic factors must be addressed before focusing on the intrinsic factors will give you any value. Bureaucracy, poor leadership skills (on your part), employees who don't get along, low wages (compared to your competitors), and poor working conditions will all lead to poor morale amongst your staff and cause them to jump ship as soon as they get the chance. You've got to get those fixed first. For example, if John simply hates working with the members of his team (poor interpersonal relationships) or the shop floor where he works is cold and draughty (poor working conditions), don't for a moment think that giving him an "Atta boy" (recognition) will motivate him. You've got to remove or reduce the de-motivators before the motivators can have full impact. So if you could assign John to a team that he gets along with, improve air circulation on the shop floor, and give him an occasional well-deserved pat on the back, then John would be motivated.

Second, once the extrinsic de-motivators have been lessened, focus on using a variety of intrinsic motivators. Remember that when it comes to motivating employees, there's no such thing as one size fits all. Different people are motivated by different things. The top three intrinsic motivators are a sense of achievement, recognition for achievement, and the work itself, so let's look at each one in turn.

A sense of achievement often comes from the ability to take something from start to finish and observe the final outcome. If John is a gardener at heart, he will likely get a sense of achievement from taking plants from seeds to seedlings. Is there a way to get him involved in all steps of the process, and not just in selling the final product?

Recognition for achievement is also valued differently by different employees. Some people prefer public recognition, others favour a private "thank-you." Take

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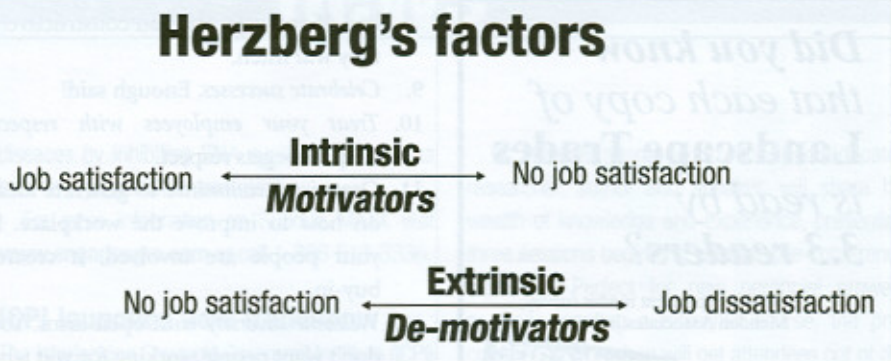
the time to find out what John's inclination is — the impact of the recognition will be greater.

The work itself is tied closely to sense of achievement. If John prefers working outdoors, and his entire shift has him working inside the store instead of in the outdoor sales area, then you've lost a prime opportunity to motivate him. See if you can't modify his work day so that he can be outside for some of the time. How will you know what his preference is? Again, ask him.

SOME IDEAS

Herzberg identified the major intrinsic and extrinsic factors in 1968, and almost 40 years later, his research findings continue to be valuable for managers everywhere. Where can you start? Here are 20 specific things you can do to motivate your employees. As you read down the list, notice that, with a few exceptions, almost all the items both reduce extrinsic de-motivators and increase intrinsic motivators.

1. *Set goals.* Everyone wants to feel like he has achieved something. If you don't



Workplace theorist Frederick Herzberg contends that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of a continuum. Rather, intrinsic positive motivators like recognition can promote satisfaction, while negative de-motivators are responsible for dissatisfaction.

- draw a line in the sand, how will you know when you get there?
2. *Say thank you often.* It goes a long way.
 3. *Offer specific and sincere praise.* As long as your praise is specific, it can never be too much.
 4. *Get to know your employees* at an individual level. What are their hobbies and their interests? Do they have children or pets?
 5. *Listen intently* when your employees are talking. You might learn something that will help you run a more

6. *Tell people why* you are asking them to do a task. It builds understanding.
7. *Facilitate lively and informational staff meetings* frequently. Your employees want to know what is happening, and appreciate when you fill them in.
8. *Offer timely and constructive performance feedback.* Your employees want to know how they're doing, good or

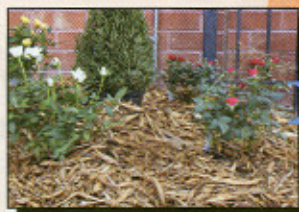
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- bad. If you offer the bad constructively, they will listen.
9. *Celebrate successes.* Enough said!
 10. *Treat your employees with respect.* Respect begets respect.
 11. *Organize a committee* to generate ideas on how to improve the workplace. If your people are involved, it creates buy-in.
 12. *Welcome diversity* with open arms. You don't want people working for you who think and dress alike. Remember, your customers are diverse – it will serve you well to have a diverse group of employees to serve them.
 13. *Offer flexibility.* Don't get caught up in the rules. Think about your purpose and the bigger picture, and bend the rules whenever you can.
 14. *Offer a safe and comfortable working environment.*
 15. *Eat together.* Food is a great motivator. It doesn't have to be fancy – pot lucks work just as well.
 16. *Play games.* Get creative, the possibilities are endless. If doable, offer small prizes.
 17. *Volunteer together.* Nothing brings a group closer than spending an afternoon together sorting food at the local food bank.
 18. *Have dress-up and dress-down days.* Obviously, adjust this one to your business environment.
 19. *Allow for creativity* and fun in decorating the workspace. People like making things their own.
 20. *Establish a stress-free zone.* Sometimes even the best jobs can get a little crazy! Give people a space in which they can relax and unwind, even for 10 or 15 minutes.

Merge Gupta-Sunderji is a leadership and workplace communication expert. Her keynotes, workshops, articles, books, radio commentary, and her training consultancy give people specific and practical tools to help achieve success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756.

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