EMPLOYEE ENTHUSIASM and MOTIVATION, KEEP IT OR KILL IT

Recall your condition when you began your current job. It was probably the time you were most motivated and enthusiastic. Remembering this and the things that were important to you give important clues about what is important to your new and current employees. Although each of us is an individual and has our own unique way of approaching work, we all share the general concerns of

- What do we do (what is our technical fit)?
- How will we do it (what is our social fit)?

Success requires both, and is impacted by enthusiasm and motivation. Both show the energy and eagerness people bring to a job. Motivation, like enthusiasm, is not something to be given to someone or to be forced. Rather, it comes as a result of being in an environment managers and colleagues help create. It is part of the "How" of work.

There are many routes to motivation and what works for one employee does not necessarily work for another. Theorists suggest people are motivated by some combination of economic security, control, recognition, personal self-worth, belonging, self-actualization, competence, meaningfulness, progress, and the ability to act freely. Understanding what are motivators for each employee, although time consuming, helps foster environments for success.

Much has been written about motivation, but there has been little focus on the causes of its absence. Mary Coeli Meyer has identified a path of demotivation which is as important to understand as motivation. Demotivation occurs when a supervisor intrudes into an area that has been identified as the responsibility of the employee. It indicates a lack of support. Acts such as not passing on important information, not respecting confidentiality, lack of feedback and inconsistent behavior are all demotivating factors. There are stages to demotivation. Beginning with a new-hire or a seasoned employee in a new situation, the first stage of something going wrong is confusion.

Confusion is a stage in which productivity drops slightly, the employee appears stressed and is asking, "What's happening? Is it me, the boss, or my work?" What the employee wants to perceive and actually does perceive are different. The employee is cooperative in this stage, but confused.
Anger is the second stage, and is typically directed at the supervisor. The employee thinks "I am hurt and I am not ready to accept the situation." Verbally the person fluctuates between normal and collaborative conversation and defensiveness. Productivity increases and the person tries to get recognition from the supervisor. The employee thinks that if more is produced and the supervisor sees the anger, some form of rectifying confrontation will occur. If the supervisor fails to act, behavior will become more erratic. It takes quite a bit of energy to maintain this phase, and it usually lasts only a week.

Subconscious Hope follows anger, in which the employee decides "I can succeed in spite of you." This stage, in which the employee's communication with the supervisor is inconsistent, is characterized by normal productivity and reduced signs of stress.

Disillusionment is characterized by lower productivity and energy. The employee has adopted a "wait and see" posture if nothing has been done by the supervisor. It is as though the employee decides that if performance is poor enough, the supervisor will have to deal with clarifying the work situation and the authority and responsibilities of the employee. The values most often affected by demotivation are pride of workmanship, authority and love. This accounts for the increased fraternizing done by the employee, and frequently a loss of enthusiasm.

It becomes increasingly difficult to turn the tide in these situations, but it is possible. The supervisor can take advantage of the employee's self-generated motivation. Direct confrontation is necessary at this point. The supervisor can describe what s/he sees. "You're not working with the same enthusiasm you once had. Is there a problem?" Having identified the problem with the employee needs the position defined and responsibilities made clear. Frequent follow-ups and consistency are necessary.

Uncooperative behavior characterizes the fifth stage. It includes employees saying or thinking "that's not my job." The employee redefines the responsibilities of the position, establishing the boundaries wherein s/he will function. More risks are taken of a negative nature and a fatalistic mode is adopted. Productivity decreases as "why bother" replaces the pseudo-optimism of "wait and see." Bickering occurs and the employee seems to be satisfied if the group is dissatisfied.

The last phase lasts from six months to twenty years! The final phase recognizes the employee's value system has been sacrificed and that the job is a plodding eight hours to fill, no more, no less. It is at this point that the employee is sent to a motivational program or special training. What has actually happened is similar to watching a car roll over a cliff, and calling a wrecker to pull it back to the top.
Consistent, competent supervision works. Noticing that the car is rolling toward the cliff and taking action to change its course is the way to deal with the situation. The key to successfully maintaining enthusiasm and motivation is knowing what kind of results you want and knowingly reinforcing them. Some simple rules help:

- Define roles and responsibilities
- Do not talk behind people's back
- Follow-through
- Be consistent
- Make feedback current, clear, and specific
- Give information and include employees in decisions which affect them

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