

Motivate don't alienate...

Keeping your workforce motivated is the Holy Grail for many business owners. Motivated staff perform better and are more productive with the natural flow on effect being more positive customer interactions.

There are limitless courses, seminars and webinars on this subject but it doesn't have to be a complex process. Here are some easy, low cost ways to gain the most from your employees.

Keep your staff informed

Provide your workers with as much non-sensitive information about the business as possible. It is hard to stay motivated if you feel excluded from what is happening around you. On the other hand it is easy to buy into the company vision and objectives if you feel informed and valued by your boss.

Although many business owners want to protect staff from anything negative most staff will already be aware when a problem is looming. It is better to halt the rumour mill, acknowledge people's concerns and explain how you are going to resolve the issue. Inviting input from those at the coalface may even provide an insight you hadn't already considered.

Commit to communication

Regular catch-ups - formal and informal - are excellent opportunities to provide feedback on how people are performing and recognise their achievements.

It is easy for busy employees to see a business purely in the context of their own workload. Staff meetings provide a great forum for departments to talk about their current projects and praise high achievers. Everyone wants public acknowledgement and it costs management nothing.

Informal one-on-one meetings are even more effective when it comes to making individuals feel valued. They

also provide an opportunity to get useful feedback on what is happening on the front line of your business - bosses can sometimes be out of touch with both the issues and successes that occur on a day to day basis.

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Become a teacher

Giving employees the chance to learn new skills is a great way to keep them engaged AND you are simultaneously deepening your skill base.

This may involve external training but often you can temporarily place an employee in another part of the business. Not only does this give them new skills and challenges it also provides a helpful backup when people go on holidays.

Moving an employee into another department for a period can also provide a valuable insight into the specific issues and challenges of that department - issues the employee may not have been aware of. This can improve empathy and cooperation between departments.

Moving employees around is a good way to assess people's capabilities. You may discover an employee can add more value in a different role. Chances are if

they excel at the new role they will enjoy it more.

Give employees ownership

Nothing motivates people more than allowing them to feel a sense of ownership over their work. Every role has core functions but if people are allowed some leeway in how outcomes are achieved they will feel empowered and strive to prove you were right to trust them.

Some specific jobs and individuals need to be micro-managed but in most roles there can be a degree of autonomy. Allowing people to make their own decisions, with the full knowledge that they are accountable for their choices, is likely to make them care much more about the outcomes.

Make time for a little fun

When fun is an occasional part of work employees get to know each other as 'real people'. Some businesses go to great lengths to introduce fun elements but certainly not all fun ideas are practical for every work environment. The key is to do something fun - no matter how small - on a regular basis.

Provide the tools for your team to succeed

Your employees are your greatest asset - so invest in them! Hiring staff is a very expensive business, so why not pay a bit more and provide your employees with the tools they need to do a spectacular job rather than a mediocre one?

If a new computer or comfortable chair is going to make an employee feel valued, it is a small price to pay for their appreciation. And it's tax deductible anyway. Isn't that a win/win for everyone?