

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

Employee Motivation: Capitalizing on the Difference

Human capital. It's the one intrinsic component we can't do business without. You can have the most automated business in your industry, but a motivated human workforce is a necessity for your company's financial and commercial success. Management texts are chock-full of theories on what will inspire, drive and encourage a workforce! But managers and supervisors know that supporting employee motivation is an ongoing challenge that requires real-time, practical application. Well then, which workplace dynamics are the most effective motivators? We must look to the individual employee for the right answer.

One size, one methodology, one motivator does not fit all. The key to employee motivation is:

- Understanding that each employee is motivated by different criteria based on his or her individual personality.
- Communicating in a manner that is effective for individual employees.
- Creating incentives and rewards that are specific to each employee's motivations.
- Applying knowledge of the individual employee's needs and aligning it to your business goals.

Applying a "one-size fits all" approach to motivation is a set-up for failure. *You really can't please all of the people all of the time with the same strategy.* We know this because we have all experienced it. What drives one employee toward high performance may stifle another and produce lackluster results. Taking the time to identify individual motivators based on different personalities is key.

Here are some steps you can take today to capitalize on the inherent differences that make up your workforce.

- **Start at the top and take stock.** If your managers are not motivated and engaged in their roles, they will not be able to motivate a workforce. An unhappy, uninvolved manager is a direct link to poor employee morale and poor departmental performance. Be sure to support your managers in the areas of their career paths, training and individual goals. Invest in your managers and treat them as the valuable link to your workforce.
- **Who are those people?** Take the time to get to know your workforce. It will be time well spent. Ask and find out what is important to each employee. Find out what matters to each individual. Employees who prefer to focus on technical competence will not share the same motivators with employees who want to excel at management and quickly climb the corporate ladder. Different areas of focus, different motivators.
- **Use the right tools.** Still not sure what motivates an employee? Utilize one of the many assessment tools that accurately indicate personality and behavior. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has been the world-wide gold standard for personality assessment since 1975. Assessments are often the quickest and most direct path to determining personality and corresponding motivation.
- **Apply the knowledge.** Tailor your management and supervisory techniques to individual personalities. Apply the best technique to each personality type. For example, assigning a research project requiring long stretches of independent work to an employee who thrives on team interaction will probably not produce the best results. Conversely, an assignment requiring a high degree of personal interaction may stress employees who do their best work when allowed to concentrate on projects in a solo fashion.

- **Create the culture.** Make sure your business environment supports the contributions of all employees – from the bottom up. Avoid the mistake of inadvertently allowing a “class system” to develop. Companywide motivation is hard to support when we only celebrate the accomplishments of the upper tier. You want a company culture in which employees can strongly motivate themselves, based on the certainty that their work is valued.
- **Align employee motivators with your business plan.** You will be able to drive improved efficiencies and performance in all areas of your business by choosing to place people in positions that effectively match their personalities. Why? Because people are naturally programmed to accomplish personal and organizational goals when those goals are aligned with their personal motivators. Knowing what motivates employees, based on knowledge of personality and preference, will enable your company to “tune the human capital engine” and experience bottom line results.

Employees are no longer considered just another factor in the output of goods and services. By utilizing management techniques that recognize and strategically align personality with a “best use” plan for human capital, your company will experience a rise in overall productivity and a matching rise in profits.

McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations’ life cycle. MKS&H’s organizational consulting division, Tandem Partners, specializes in people strategies that drive business results. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please contact Melissa McDaniel at 301-662-2400 or via email: melissa@mksh.com.

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McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

11311 McCormick Road, Suite 100
Hunt Valley, MD 21031
410.296.6200

www.mksh.com

70 Thomas Johnson Drive, Suite 100
Frederick, MD 21702
301.662.2400