

How to Motivate Employees

Managers often complain that their employees just don't care. I think the problem is much deeper than that, and many business owners ignore the real problem. Let me explain why.

As managers see it, the problem is that their employees are:

- Going through the motions, just barely getting the required work done
- Not learning, making the same mistakes over and over
- Lack of enthusiasm, coming in late, long lunches, lots of time texting

Often, the question is posed as "what is wrong with them?" Solutions are to micromanage them, discipline them, even fire them and "get someone who wants to work."

I want to give you a real-life example. By the time I am finished, I hope that you will be able to understand what the underlying problem is, and how we can address it successfully.

A client contacted me because of personnel problems with his retail store, an established wine and liquor store in a busy shopping plaza. In addition to the owner, the store had a manager and seven employees.

The owner and I sat down in his small, crowded office and told me his problems. His employees did not follow the schedule. They often did not show up for work, or decided that they did not want to work extra hours during the holiday season, when the majority of the store's annual sales were made. They didn't seem to care. I asked the owner what happened when employees did not show up for work. He answered, "in that case I just work the hours. I really don't want to, I have other things I need to do. But I have no choice."

I then asked the owner, "Why do the employees think they are here?"

"To get a check," he replied. I nodded, and asked, "and what else do you think the employees receive, or look forward to?"

The owner thought about it for a minute, and replied, "we don't give any benefits or paid time off here. Two years ago, I gave them a bonus, but not last year. My question is, what have they done beyond the basics of the job to deserve a bonus?"

Let's summarize the situation:

1. Owner provides nothing but a paycheck.
2. Employees act like it is only about the paycheck.

What is missing here?

First off, let's be clear. All companies must make a profit to survive, so money is absolutely critical. Beyond that essential requirement, however, comes the most powerful driver of company success and motivated, committed employees: the company culture.

Company culture starts with a clear and powerful purpose. Why is the company here, who does it serve, what outcomes does it want to achieve?

The Netflix Example

Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility



Netflix' business strategy is to grow their streaming subscription business globally. Their vision is to become the best global entertainment distribution provider in the world. To do so, Netflix promotes a culture that provides its "customers stellar service, our suppliers a valuable partner, our investors the prospects of sustained profitable growth, and our employees the allure of huge impact."

In order to achieve these business results, Netflix' culture focuses on 9 values that it wants all employees to follow: judgment, communication, impact, curiosity, innovation, courage, passion, honesty and selflessness.

"With the Right People, Instead of a Culture of Process Adherence, We have a Culture of Creativity and Self-Discipline, Freedom and Responsibility." (Netflix Employee Handbook)

Does that mean that anything goes? No, of course not. Although Netflix emphasizes freedom, there are two types of necessary rules: Prevent irrevocable disaster, and moral, ethical, legal issues (dishonesty, harassment, etc.)

Netflix is not nirvana. Surely there are daily issues and problems that challenge managers and other employees alike. But there is a strong overall business culture that guides everyone. People who buy into it stay and thrive, and those that do not, leave.

What has Netflix to do with our wine and liquor store? Really, everything. All successful companies must find a higher purpose and meaning beyond the cash register. People seek order and purpose in their life. They want to work in a place where there is a clearly articulated mission. They want to know how they fit in that mission, what their roles are, and how they can excel and share in the rewards of success.

The first step is asking some strategic questions. How can I best serve my customers? What culture do we need in order to support that? How should my employees act? How do I clearly communicate and support this culture, so my employees understand our customer focus and what this will mean for them and their families?

Therefore, if your staff seems disinterested, the first move isn't to start firing, or yelling, or even throwing parties and handing out bonuses. Analyze the company culture. Is your message, "we're only in it for the money?"

So let's take care of the big picture first, then go after the details. Yes, companies with a purpose still have employees who are not engaged, but it is far clearer what the problem is and to take steps to remedy it. Putting the right people in the right seats on the bus is a lot easier when you know where the bus is going.

My client understands this better now, but it will take a lot of thought and work to make it a reality. Contact us to help you on this difficult but massively important transition.