

Achieving Higher Levels of Performance

by Kathleen Gage



Many companies are searching for ways to encourage their staff to achieve higher levels of performance. Managers often believe money is the primary motivator for every employee. While money can be an important in showing employees their worth to the organization, it may not be as effective as other methods.

A primary limitation with money linked to performance reviews is that it only occurs once a year. Achievements and progress need to be rewarded much more frequently. Your organization can set up a variety of incentive programs to accomplish this.

The key to success in any incentive program is to find out what motivates your employees. Often a company will set up an incentive program designed by the management team with little, if any, input from the people they want to motivate. The challenge with this approach is that what motivates a member of the management team may not be a good motivator for frontline workers, salespeople, trainers, or other positions.

A few years back, I was responsible for a team of 25 people. There were individuals in training, sales, administrative and support positions. We were going through a very intense time building the business. I knew that my team was going the extra mile, so I thought of a variety of ways to acknowledge their hard work. I invited the entire team out for dinner and they could bring a guest of their choice. I thought this was a great idea. My great idea backfired.

Interestingly, all the trainers and support staff showed up with a guest. However, not one member of the sales team attended. The following Monday, I asked each of them why they had not come. Turns out all of the sales staff would have felt more appreciated had I given them money instead of dinner. This was a very important lesson for me. I made the assumption since we all got along so great during the day, everyone would jump at the chance to mingle after work. This was not the case at all.

One other way I acknowledged my team's hard work was to personally send a thank you card to the spouse of every team member. I simply wanted to acknowledge that they

were also a part of the company's success. This worked extremely well.

For entry-level staff members, frequency of rewards and acknowledgment is important to your success. In many positions the average length of employment can be as little as a few weeks or a few months. The question you might ask yourself is, "What does it cost to replace an entry-level worker and how much would it be worth to retain them 20 or 30% longer than average?"

When I have surveyed employees to find out what motivates them, appreciation is on top of their list. Many managers lose sight of this important fact. A simple thanks for their contribution to the success of the company works wonders. A simple thank you card acknowledging a specific contribution they made such as going the extra mile for a customer. What about tickets to a movie theater with a couple hours off? Or a gift certificate to their favorite store or restaurant? The possibilities are endless.

A common frustration with all levels of staff is not being informed about matters that impact their job, the company and them personally. Many employees would perform at a much higher level if they could grasp the big picture.

Additionally, many employees would like to contribute ideas to streamline operations and yet, they are seldom, if ever, asked for their input. A great motivator for people is when they are asked for input and given credit for their ideas. Motivation is significantly decreased when employees are asked for their ideas and a manager takes credit as if it was their own.

What you can do is limited only by your creativity and budget. When it comes to the budget, it is important to acknowledge how much the employee's contribution has added to the bottom line. Make sure that whatever reward you give matches the efforts of the individual or team.

So begin today to find ways to really appreciate how important your team is to your success.

Columnist Kathleen Gage is a business advisor, keynote speaker, trainer and author working with family-owned businesses, franchised organizations, corporations in both the private and public sector in areas of marketing, PR, customer relations and employee satisfaction.

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