

Motivating the under performing employee



You know the picture, they do just the bare minimum, just enough to get by. They never volunteer for extra projects, or grasp opportunities for growth and development. But they certainly seem to have time to criticize their manager, their co-workers and often the company as a whole. They have plenty of time for all the gossip and rumors, lots of time to send email and to take breaks.

So how do you deal with the under performers?

It is certain that they will not improve on their own, you will have to take an active role to change their behavior and their performance. By allowing his or her behavior and performance to continue, you lowered the bar for all other employees, and create a morale problem for other employees who are watching this person get away with not carrying their share of the workload. This leads to loss of confidence in your management team as a whole.

The first step is to acknowledge that you have a problem that you need to address. Start by meeting with the employee to ask questions. When the employee was hired, they were excited enough to impress those who interviewed and hired them. So what happened to all that excitement and drive? Finding out what happened to change the employee's outlook on work each day is key to figuring ways to fix the performance.

It may be something as simple as a suggestion the employee made awhile back that was not acknowledged or acted upon. Or it may be that the employee no longer feels challenged with the work they are assigned each day. However, until you know the root cause, you are unlikely to find a good solid solution that will work.

Admittedly, getting to the root of the problem can often be a challenge. The employee is unlikely to feel that the problem lies with them. Instead they are more likely to place the blame on others, or to point to the

management team. Your job is to keep asking questions about what changed from their first week on the job until now that changed the excitement they once had with the job. By continuing to come back to this very basic question, you will eventually come around to some hints and answers.

Once you have a source of the discontent, you may need to take a deep breath, and then evaluate what you have learned. You will need to decide if the employee has a legitimate reason for the change in approach to the job. You will also need to decide if the root of the problem is something you can fix, or if it is something the employee will have to fix. You may also find that the problem is squarely rooted in your recruiting and hiring process. It may be that your recruiting process failed to recognize the signs of a candidate that moves from job to job because they do not have the skills and the tools to acclimate and grow in a job.

Regardless of the root source, it is crucial that the employee acknowledge that his or her reaction to the root cause, namely the diminished performance and approach at work is not an acceptable way to react and behave. Recognizing that each employee owns their reaction to work situations is often as much of a challenge as is fixing the root problem. An employee who demonstrated that they are unwilling to accept ownership of their reactions and behaviors is unlikely to be able to make the necessary corrections to succeed in any job.

It goes without saying that fixing a legitimate complaint by the employee is the quickest and easiest solution. If you have made a mistake that caused the employee to lose their drive, the best way to re-motivate them is to acknowledge the mistake, apologize for not recognizing it sooner and implement a solution. This sends a very positive message not only to the under performing employee, but to all of your employees. It suddenly makes you human, and that is one of the strongest motivators for employees.

If instead, the root of the problem is not an error or a problem to be fixed by you, the employer, there are still steps you can take to help the employee make the necessary changes.

Start by reminding the employee of the upsides of his or her success with the job. This may include areas beyond the simple outcome of keeping a job. An employee who is able to turn a situation around reaps huge rewards in increased self esteem, gained respect of their co-workers, and

often a new enthusiasm for life in general. I don't know of any employee who gets up in the morning and feels energized and excited to go to work when THEY know they are not giving it their all, and succeeding in the job.

One of the best ways to help an employee make corrections is for their employer to enable them to do so. As strange as that may sound, your approach makes all the difference for many employees. Telling your employee that you have every faith in them, and that you KNOW that they WILL succeed is the best boost an employee can have. Many employees have never experienced the exhilaration of having someone truly believe in them.

Often, the employee wants to make the corrections, but has no idea where to start or how to put one foot in front of the other to make the changes. You can help by working with them to set up several small short-term goals that they can easily achieve. A taste of success wets the appetite for more success. So set the goals, and then meet with the employee and CELEBRATE their success as you set more goals.

Make sure that you acknowledge positive changes. Putting a focus on the correct performance or behavior is always a better approach than trying to beat them up about the negative side of the equation. Employees crave recognition, and with that, will strive to repeat that which gains them recognition. If you recognize only the sub standard performance or inappropriate things the employee does, in a way you are actually encouraging them to continue down that path.

Lastly, look for ways that you can include something each day that they employee will truly enjoy doing, giving them something to look forward to each day. Focus on their strengths and look for ways to expand the opportunities for that employee to use those strengths in their day-to-day work.