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Online Report

A best practice report For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders
and Internal Consultants

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Issue No 7: Tips to energise and motivate your staff that will last...

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Tips to energise and motivate your staff that will last...

I recently caught up with Dianne who manages a very large outsourced call center. It had been 6 months since I worked with Dianne so I was very interested in how things were going. Dianne said she had been “very surprised recently that people did not seem interested in money”. My curiosity was piqued.

Let me give some background to those unfamiliar with call centers. In this inbound call center (customers ring in for help) you can have up to 40 operators sitting on the phones (tethered is closer to the right description). Their call rate and performance is monitored constantly to maintain standards of service to the customers. A good operator might answer about 100 calls in a shift. A lot of the calls may be similar and the operator is expected to treat the first caller of the day and the last call of the day with the same attitude and professionalism. Not an easy task. Like a lot of rolls in the workplace the repetitive nature of the work can make way for boredom to set in and motivation to be low.

Back to Dianne and her story

Recently after the call center had been operating for one year with spectacular success (Dianne's call center has been nominated for the best performing call center in Australia and her company has won many awards for being an employer with high level of staff engagement). Dianne offered a pay rise to all the staff. All 115 staff members were sent an email informing them of the pay rise. Dianne did not receive one email positive or negative on the pay rise. Not long after the “pay rise” email Dianne sent out another email which told of the changes that are happening and also the opportunities to be involved in the coming months. Suddenly Dianne was deluged with interest from operators on wanting to be involved. The energy and zest in the call centre showed a noticeable rise...something the pay rise did not achieve.

Top 10 ways to energise and motivate

To be nominated for a call center of the year I have listed the top 10 ways that Dianne and her team energise and motivate their people:

1. Involve team members in projects for improvement as mentioned above
2. Split people into teams to support one another.
3. Recognise Recognise and Recognise...Use opportunities to reward people for their achievements. It can be a movie ticket, certificate, spending vouchers or email
4. One on one performance review with team leaders at least once every six weeks. Expectations are reviewed and reset.
5. Have fund raising activities to pay for nights out.
6. Create "red letter" days that become regular events and are part of the culture.
7. Celebrate birthdays and milestones
8. Keep teams informed on developments in the organization with regular team meetings, emails and intranet
9. Look for opportunities to mentor future leaders. (They prefer to home grow their future leaders to preserve culture)
10. Provide them with training and facilities that allow them to do their work. All training conducted in house to preserve the culture.

Dianne and her team put in a lot of time to energise and motivate their teams. As Dianne says if there is a short cut it's doing the right things consistently over time.

Work can be boring and the staff want to matter

Many managers I have observed simply don't realize that their team members maybe be "tethered" to their work looking for opportunities to be more involved and break the boredom of their job. One of my clients recently took umbrage when I suggested that some of his team did not feel they mattered. He barked back at me "I have given them a coffee machine, taken them out for a sandwich, treated them to a workshop at a prestigious hotel and made sure they have time off when they need it".

Let me be clear what my client is doing is good. This will make it harder for his staff to leave however it's not going to make them stay and be motivated. As one of his staff members said "I want to feel like I count...I want to be involved." If this sounds like a child winging for attention in many ways it is. It's not something that should be dismissed with "they should grow up and get on with it" They should if they are demanding an inordinate amount of time but most staff don't. They want some time to feel they matter and that they are given an opportunity to make a contribution.

Let's reflect on the thoughts of Jack Welch (former CEO of GE) who is recognized as one of the best modern developers of leaders. Jack said he would spend about 50% of his time training and talking to his executives. That is not 50% of one day but 50% of his work year. How much time do you spend with your staff proactively? That is you get out from your desk and ask yourself "what can I do or say to this person today that will make them achieve more today and into the future"?

Many of you are reading this and probably thinking this is something you have heard before. What I am saying is not brain surgery. If you are committed to improving interest and motivation then you can no matter who you are or how old you are. It starts with changing your habits one at a time in small baby steps and see what happens. If you are stuck and want some assistance refer back to your best report #2 on changing habits... If you want another copy of that report please let me know.

Main takeaways

- Most people would not rank monetary reward as a prime motivator
- Look for opportunities to involve your staff
- Giving staff things and making it comfortable will make it hard for people to leave but wont ensure they stay
- To improve motivation give staff an opportunity to be involved and grow
- Start with small changes

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