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Keeping up Employee Morale during Troubling Times

For many businesses, money is tight, leading to layoffs, reduction of benefits, and withdrawal of benefits that used to be an expected part of a workday, such as free coffee and lunches. As a consequence, workplaces are more stressful places to be, increasing the risk of low morale to develop. We all know the consequences of low morale: decreased productivity, compromised customer service, high turnover, etc.

In good economic times, workplace morale is often increased using high cost measures, including bonuses, free “perks” like lunches and company outings, and pay increases. As these measures become less and less feasible, workers are becoming more insecure about their futures and stressed about money.

So how can an organization maintain or increase morale when money is tight? There are many free and inexpensive ways to do this:

- Acknowledge a job well done with a note, in addition to verbal feedback. A short note letting an employee know that he or she is appreciated can go a long way.
- Encourage your employees to do something to increase cohesion, like having a pot luck dessert on Fridays.
- Celebrate employees’ birthdays
- Ask about employees’ families and outside lives.
- Work closely with employees in identifying goals and support them in achieving them.

When financial means of rewarding employees and increasing morale become impossible, an opportunity to connect with and support employees in an effective way is created. These methods of increasing morale may even be more effective than the ones that cost much more money.

Anger in the Workplace

Many workplaces are positive and productive environments, where anger does not become a major problem. However, it is not unheard of that one employee’s anger can create a whole host of problems for an organization. Anger can be the catalyst for sexual harassment and workplace violence, both

issues from which companies have a responsibility to protect workers.

Anger can be distinguished from hostility in that hostility is generally an employee’s preexisting way of being; whereas anger is a response to negative situation in the workplace. Thus, many issues that cause workplace anger can be dealt with directly and effectively. Some common causes of workplace anger are: withdrawal of benefits, micromanagement, poor communication, unreasonable demands, consistently negative feedback, etc. Some of these issues can and should be addressed and others cannot be changed. For example, a withdrawal of benefits may be a necessary step to prevent further layoffs.

In these difficult times, there may not be any choice but to do things that cause employees to be angry, including laying off employees, reducing pay, and withdrawing perks. Employees will have different reactions to these situations, but chances are some will become angry. Anger is a natural response and is not an inherently bad reaction. An employer can react to employee anger in a way that will diffuse the anger or escalate it. A very simple way to minimize the chances the anger will escalate is to validate the employee’s feelings. Validating does not mean that you agree with the employee; rather, validating



means acknowledging the feeling and the difficulty of the situation. Of course, an employer would rather the employee accept the changes unquestioningly “for the good of the company,” but this is not always possible and expecting it can make the employee feel resentful and unappreciated. Remaining aware that employees are feeling the negative consequences of often necessary decisions made by employers and often just want support and reassurance from their supervisors can keep volatile situations from escalating.

Adapted from www.enotes.com/small-business-encyclopedia/workplace-anger

Sleep and the Employee

Our culture does not place a high premium on sleep, and as a consequence, Americans are sleeping less than they used to and less than they need. Lack of sleep can decrease productivity, increase the incidence of mistakes, and make it more difficult to make appropriate decisions. There are many reasons why employees are not getting the sleep that they need: demands of a family, working many hours a day, stress, a new baby at home, etc. Regardless of the reason, employers should be aware of sleep deprivation as an issue for their workforce.

In order to manage sleep deprivation, some workers may require a nap during the workday. While this is generally frowned

upon in the workplace, allowing employees to use their lunch and/or break times to grab a quick, rejuvenating nap can go a long way in alleviating the effects of sleep deprivation. Short naps are more effective in refueling than long naps, which can interfere with nighttime sleep, and as long as the employee is responsible about waking on time and not disturbing others, there is no reason not to allow this practice.

Outside of napping at work, there are other ways of combating sleep deprivation. Proper sleep hygiene is necessary for people who have difficulty getting enough sleep and consists of going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, creating a calming and unstimulating environment where one sleeps, exercising regularly (but not too soon before bedtime), and avoiding alcohol and nicotine. If you find that an employee is tired or irritable, and you are concerned about his or her work quality as a consequence, you can provide some of these hints and/or refer them to the EAP for help with this issue.

Adapted from www.careerknowhow.com/ask_sue/sleep-at-work.htm

Please join us for our semi-annual EAP Breakfast, titled “Employment Issues in a Recession” at Family Service, Inc. on May 19, 2009 from 8AM to 10:30AM.

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