# COMMON MYTHS

#### **ABOUT EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION**

Motivating employees is extremely important to managers and supervisors, but despite its importance, several myths persist.

#### MYTH 1: I can motivate people

Not really. They have to motivate themselves. You can't motivate people any more than you can empower them. Employees have to motivate and empower themselves. However, you can set up an environment in which they can best motivate and empower themselves. The key is knowing how to set up the environment for each of your employees.

#### MYTH 2: Money is a good motivator

Certain things like money, a nice office, and job security can help people from becoming less motivated, but they usually don't help people to become more motivated. A key goal is to understand the motivations of each of your employees.

#### MYTH 3: Fear is a good motivator

Fear is a great motivator — for a very short time. A lot of yelling from the boss certainly won't "light a fire under employees" for an extended period.

#### MYTH 4: I know what motivates me, so I know what motivates my employees

Different people are motivated by different things. You may be motivated by earning time away from your job to spend with family. You may be motivated by recognition of a job well done. People are not motivated by the same things. Again, a key goal is to understand what motivates each of your employees.

### MYTH 5: Increased job satisfaction means increased job performance

Research shows this isn't necessarily true. If the goals of the organization are not aligned with the goals of employees, then employees aren't effectively working toward the mission of the organization.

#### MYTH 6: I can't comprehend employee motivation — it's a science

Not true. Some very basic steps you can take will go a long way toward supporting your employees to motivate themselves to increased performance in their jobs.



### BASIC PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

### Motivating employees starts with motivating yourself

Enthusiasm is contagious. If you're enthusiastic about your job, it's much easier for others to be as well. And if you're succeeding in taking care of yourself and your own job, you'll have a much clearer perspective on how others are doing in theirs.

A great place to start learning about motivation is to start understanding your own motivations. Is it time with family? Is it recognition for a job well done or learning opportunities? How is your job configured to support your own motivations? What can you do to better motivate yourself?

### Always work to align goals of the organization with goals of employees

Employees can be all fired up about their work and working very hard. However, if the

results of their work don't contribute to the goals of the organization, then the organization is not any better off than if the employees were sitting on their hands. Therefore, it's critical that managers and supervisors know what they want from their employees.

What is required from employees should be worded in terms of goals for the organization. Identifying the goals for the organization is usually done during strategic planning. Ensure that employees have strong input into identifying their goals, and that these goals are aligned with the goals of the organization.

## Key to supporting the motivation of your employees is understanding what motivates each of them

Each person is motivated by different things. Whatever steps you take to support the motivation of your employees should first include finding out what it is that really motivates each of them. You can find this out by asking them, listening to them, and observing them.

### Recognize that supporting employee motivation is a process, not a task

Organizations change all the time, as do people. Indeed, it is an ongoing process to sustain an environment in which employees can strongly motivate themselves. If you look at sustaining employee motivation as an ongoing process, then you'll be much more fulfilled and motivated yourself.

### Support employee motivation by using organizational systems

Use reliable and comprehensive systems in the workplace to help motivate employees. For example, establish compensation systems, employee performance systems, and organizational policies and procedures to support employee motivation. Establishing systems and structures helps ensure clear understanding and equitable treatment of employees.

#### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

These specific steps can help you go a long way toward motivating employees:

### What motivational factors sustain you, and what can you do to sustain them.

This little bit of motivation planning can give a strong perspective on how to think about supporting the motivations of employees.

#### Make a list of three to five things that motivate each of your employees.

Fill out the list yourself for each of your employees, and then them fill out the list for themselves. Compare your answers to theirs. Then meet with each of them to discuss what they think are their most important motivational factors. Last, take some time alone to write down how you will modify your approaches with each employee to ensure their motivational factors are being met. Learn to become more comfortable with them. The place to start is to recognize their importance.

#### Ensure your reward system takes each employee into consideration.

For example, their jobs might be redesigned to be more fulfilling. You might find more opportunities to provide recognition, if that is important to them. Or you might develop a personnel policy that rewards employees with more family time.

### Have one-on-one meetings with each employee.

Employees are motivated more by your care and concern for them than by your attention to them. Get to know your employees, their families, their favourite foods, names of their children, and so on. This can sound manipulative, and it will be if not done sincerely. However, even if you want to get to know each of your employees, it may not happen unless you intentionally set aside time to be with each of them.

#### Cultivate strong delegation skills.

Delegation includes conveying responsibility and authority to your employees so they can carry out certain tasks. It allows employees to take a stronger role in their jobs, which usually means more fulfillment and motivation.

#### Reward it when you see it.

A critical lesson for new managers and supervisors is to learn to focus on employee behaviours, not on employee personalities. Performance in the workplace should be based on behaviours toward goals, not on popularity of employees.

#### Reward it soon after you see it.

This helps to reinforce the notion that you highly prefer the behaviours that you're currently seeing from your employees. Generally, the shorter the time between an employee's action and your reward for the action, the clearer it is to the employee that you highly prefer that action

### Implement at least the basic principles of performance management.

Good performance management includes identifying goals, measures to indicate if the goals are being met or not, ongoing attention and feedback, and corrective actions, when necessary, to redirect activities back toward achieving the goals.

#### Establish goals that are SMARTER.

SMARTER goals are: specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, timely, extending of capabilities, and rewarding to those involved.

### Clearly convey how employee results contribute to organizational results.

Employees often feel strong fulfillment from realizing that they're actually making a difference. This realization often requires clear communication about organizational goals, employee progress toward those goals, and celebration when goals are met.

#### Celebrate achievements.

This critical step is often forgotten. Experienced managers come to understand that acknowledging and celebrating a solution to a problem can be every bit as important as the solution itself. Without ongoing acknowledgment of success, employees become frustrated, skeptical, and even cynical about efforts in the organization.

#### Let employees hear from their customers.

Let employees hear customers proclaim the benefits of the efforts of the employee. For example, if the employee is working to keep internal computer systems running for other employees in the organization, have these "internal customers" express their gratitude to the employee.

### Admit to yourself if you don't like an employee.

Managers and supervisors are people. It's usual to not like someone who works for you. In this case, admit this to yourself. Explore what it is you don't like, to come to a clearer perception of how you can accomplish a positive working relationship with the employee. It often helps just to talk out loud about how you feel and get someone else's opinion about the situation.

If you continue to focus on employee behaviours and performance, and not personalities, you'll go a long way toward ensuring that your treatment of employees remains fair and equitable.



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