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motivating your staff

"I HATE MY JOB. My boss doesn't appreciate or acknowledge my input, I'm underpaid, bored to death and clock watching is my new passion."

Sound familiar? Whether people genuinely love their job or whether it's just the means to a pay cheque, it is common to hear people occasionally complain about some aspect of their work. But where do you draw the line between innocent whining and genuine discontentment? If you have an employee who is really unhappy at work is it because they are in the wrong job or is it the environment they are working in?

The challenge for employers does not end once they have selected and hired a new staff member for their business. To retain staff and reduce turnover, employers must acknowledge, develop and implement strategies to ensure an attractive workplace, maintain staff morale and provide job satisfaction for all. Fostering a workplace environment which allows staff to maximise their skills, focus and motivation can provide great benefit to both employers and employees. A positive management style and workplace culture can result in staff who enjoy their work more and feel that their contribution is valued. Research also shows that employers who successfully implement ways to motivate their staff are more likely to experience greater productivity and lower absenteeism within the team. So what can employers do to maintain staff motivation? While many companies consider higher salaries, incentives and monetary bonuses, it must be stressed that we all have different goals and values that motivate us and it is crucial to recognise these individual differences. It might be that we desire more flexibility in our work hours, the opportunity to provide greater input to business decision making, professional development and training or simply a need to feel more appreciated or challenged.

Here are some ways to determine what motivates your staff and how this fits with the needs of your business:

Find out what motivates your staff - Get together with your staff to find out what appeals to them. This may be discussed as part of individual staff meetings over a few weeks or during your business planning activities with the team. Areas for discussion may include:

- Personal career goals - What interests them and what are they looking for in their job. Are they seeking greater decision-making responsibility over time?
- Training and development - What are their personal development and individual learning needs?
- Remuneration and benefits - Are they looking for cash incentives or non-financial incentives, such as flexible working hours and time off for personal or family responsibilities?

- Social activities - Do they want more opportunities to interact with their colleagues such as getting together for morning tea, celebrating special events, starting a sports team or meeting for Friday afternoon drinks?

- Work environment - Is the office equipment and your work methods up-to-date? Are your staff happy with the structure of the workplace including amenities provided, office set-up etc?

- Communication - Do they feel that they are adequately informed of what's happening in the business? Do they believe they are getting enough constructive feedback and acknowledgement for their work?

Determine the extent to which your business can accommodate staff needs.

- If your staff are motivated by cash incentives, consider the financial capacity of your business to provide these. Aggressive sales competitions should be kept separate from rewarding hard work but things like gift vouchers, movie tickets or a dinner for two at the end of each quarter can be very successful in motivating staff.

- If you can't afford cash incentives, consider introducing non-financial incentives such as flexible work hours or rostered days off. It is important to determine whether introducing workplace flexibility will impact significantly on the productivity of your business.

Communicate your proposed incentives with your staff:

- Communicating with your staff is crucial in this process, so that they can play a part in structuring a more efficient workplace that better accommodates their desires and, in turn, leads to a more motivated workforce. Never make your staff feel like they should be grateful for your generosity or that you think they are in desperate need of motivation. It should be a genuine exchange where the potential impacts of the new arrangements are discussed. It is logical that if your staff are not happy with the incentives, they won't be effectively motivated in the workplace.

Implement the changes:

- Act immediately in enforcing the agreed initiatives. Show your staff that you are serious about rewarding their efforts and introduce the changes immediately for a trial period. Provide a structured policy so that the arrangements are clearly understood. You should give information regarding what needs to be achieved in order to receive the incentive. After the trial period, reassess the arrangements in place and adjust accordingly.