

How to Keep your Staff Motivated During the Recession

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The world as we know it is going through unprecedented times. Most businesses are shut due to COVID-19 and for those that are deemed essential and are allowed to continue operations, demand is so depressed that they themselves are barely generating enough to cover running costs. Most of those in positions of responsibility have little or no first-hand experience of dealing with a recession of this magnitude on a global scale bar 2008. The World Bank has forecasted that Sub Saharan Africa will have its first recession in over 25 years.

When the operating conditions are hostile, it's tempting for business owners and managers to put engagement initiatives to one side and focus on organizational pressures. However, this is precisely the time when actively engaging with your employees is most critical as they will be scrutinizing and judging leadership behaviour even more closely. It is during the tough economic times that there is an overriding need for experienced, loyal, and enthusiastic employees who are committed to the company's success.

Companies can give monetary incentives as motivation for employees when the economy and their business is booming. But, it is not always so easy to motivate employees financially, especially when the economy takes a hit, and your business is also bearing the brunt of it. The reality on the ground is that most companies are currently implementing layoffs and pay cuts meaning that already your team's morale is probably low from thinking what possibly lies ahead.

Here are possible strategies that companies to stay ahead of the curve and to motivate their employees during this tough time.

Communication

This is the first and most necessary step. Recession is the time when unwanted rumors swirl in the workplace, leading to panic among employees. To be effective, communication should be comprehensive, credible and two-way. There needs to be an ability to act on employee input and where a commitment is given, follow it through. When suggestions are not in the best interests of the company this needs to be explained clearly. Share as much financial information as possible – by being upfront and open from the start you will build trust and confidence.

It is important that staff believe in what the organization stands for.

A mismatch of values between the organization and the workforce will cause stress and a sense of dissatisfaction within the individual. Employees need to have a sense of belonging to the organization and be able to see the future past the current recession. Some questions to ask yourself as employers on where you stand

- How well do your staff understand what your organization is about?
- How do you know?
- How well known is your company's vision for the future and its mission in achieving it?
- Were they involved in creating it?
- How might you engage your team in developing and embedding your values throughout the company or department?

Attitude of Managers

Every manager will affect employee engagement and disengaged leaders can cause enormous damage. There needs to be a unified approach that starts at the top. Even if employees don't like the information or actions given to them, they will be watching how the owners and managers behave and judge the company accordingly.

Create Explicit Realistic Expectations

Creating expectations that are dashed creates huge levels of dissatisfaction on both sides. Only promise what you know you can deliver and be entirely upfront about what you expect from your employees during this period. When an organization is transparent, it is far easier to have the hard conversations. When people feel they have been fairly dealt with they are much more likely to be part of the team effort and make the sacrifices for the greater good.

Looking Beyond Money

While money is important, it does not necessarily outrank all other factors when it comes to employee motivation. There are multiple other factors that you can use to motivate your employees when the budgets are tight. Acknowledging an employee publicly for a job well-done increases their self-worth. A thank you which recognizes the efforts people have made makes a huge difference to the way they feel. A short note saying thanks for a job well done takes on a huge significance to the person receiving it when they know it is really meant.

Entrusting them with more responsibilities, taking their input on critical matters, and giving them a platform to voice their concerns or opinions are all-powerful motivating strategies to earn your employees' trust and loyalty. When the bleak economy spreads its blues into the employees' life as well, go out of your way to show how much they are valued and their contributions are appreciated.

To Motivate Your Staff You Need To Know What Motivates Them

Ultimately as an external consultant, there are only so many solutions that we can give to up staff morale. Knowing your staff and applying customized solutions means you listen carefully and you can discover what motivates them. The language they use, the actions they take can inform you of what internal drivers and motivators make them tick. Once you understand where they are coming from it becomes so much easier to speak their language and to give them the opportunity to thrive. When they are thriving professionally your department or organization has far more potential to succeed and ride

out this tough time.

The next couple of months will no doubt be very tough in the business world. Motivating employees is particularly important at this time and it is worth remembering that keeping your employees engaged does not necessarily have to be financially related.

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