

Keeping Employees Motivated In Tough Economic Times

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When the economic going gets tough, the tough get going. It is said that organisations don't really close, but it is management that choose to close their mind. Organisation leaders who are not deterred by the tough economic situation are always coming up with strategies to stay afloat. These strategies aim to increase productivity, manage costs and retain employees. Employee retention is one of the key factors for business survival. Employees are the key resource the organisation has and it cannot function well without them.

Employees are important to the organisation; management should avoid making hostile decisions that affect the morale of employees. Despite the difficult economic times the organisation need to keep its best talent around. In fact it is the best time to be honest and engage positively with the employees while pulling through the challenging times. It is the responsibilities of the organisation leaders and managers to make sure their employees remain motivated and more productive. I have put together three strategies you can employ as an organisation to keep employees motivated and productive in tough economic times.

RECOGNISE AND APPRECIATE THEIR EFFORTS

Everyone finds pleasure in being recognised and appreciated for their efforts and hard work, the same goes for employees. Recognising and appreciating hard work is one of the best ways to motivate employees, especially in tough times. You need to recognise those individuals who are working so hard to keep the organisation afloat. Acknowledge their efforts and contribution they are making for the organisation's success and overall objectives.

The times might be tough, but make sure that your employees know that they are appreciated and that their hard work is making a difference. Do something to show recognition and appreciation. It could be a pat on the back, a kind word of encouragement in front of other employees, free lunch, or an award, it doesn't necessarily have to be financial appreciation. When you recognise and appreciate the employees' efforts it means that you are paying attention to what they are doing for the success of the organisation.

This goes a long way in motivating and boosting the morale of the employees. The more your employees feel recognised and appreciated the more they feel a sense of ownership of their work, feel valued and encouraged. The more they feel encouraged the more they are supportive to the overall business objectives. Recognition has a direct impact on the bottom line as employees feel more appreciated at work; they become highly motivated and active at work therefore improving productivity.

ENSURE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

When times are hard, employees become so much concerned about their job safety. Some will be coming to work fearing that today could be their last day at work; they keep their head down hoping that they don't get retrenched. Creating a positive work environment that promotes and ensures psychological safety will have a positive impact on the overall productivity and morale of the employees. Don't be tough on employees when things are tough, rather create an environment where employees feel free to come up with their own processes while you give them direction.

You need to be approachable, keep lines of communication open and be keen to answer questions from your employees. Employees feel psychologically safe when they are comfortable voicing their opinions without any fear of being judged or victimized. Instilling fear and threatening the employees only makes the situation worse off. Develop an open mindset at work where people are free to air out their views at the same time giving necessary feedback to their concerns. Be open to opinions and suggestions that are different from yours. You may consider bringing a motivational speaker to encourage and inspire positivity at the workplace and engaging in continuous staff development efforts in a way to ensure psychological safety.

Approach conflict and issues as a collaborator where you seek to achieve a mutually desirable outcome rather than just having your way only. Let there be fairness and sincerity in the way you deal with the workplace challenges. Encourage your team to be solution conscious, instead of just shutting them down, ask them for solutions. Ask questions like, "What do you think can be done differently to ease the situation?" "How can I support you?" Rather than criticism, encourage teams and individuals to see feedback as a way to strengthen and build upon their ideas and processes. This will make the employees feel as part of the solution and they will be motivated to do more.

KEEP EMPLOYEES IN THE LOOP

When the going gets tough, everyone notice that things are out of the ordinary and this may spark feelings of fear within the organization. When you communicate effectively and proactively keeping your employees in the loop you avoid the silence treatment that comes from the fear that things might go wrong. By withholding information to make things easier on your employees, you may inadvertently lose their trust and send their minds into panic and worst-case scenario thinking. If you don't keep your employees in the loop they might start making assumptions to fill in the gaps that they might have. Find ways to make sure that you keep your employees on the loop in every interaction you have. You should honestly and openly communicate about the issues affecting the organization.

Keeping your employees in the loop increases the levels of trust they have with the management and organisation than trying to protect them from bad news. There is less likely to be heavy reliance on guesses and spreading of gossip at workplace when everyone knows what is going on. Gossip and rumours can cause reduced productivity and time wasting, low morale and lack of trust, and increased anxiety and stress among employees. It becomes easier to implement changes when you keep your employees in the loop since they will be familiar with how the change will impact them and they will respond more effectively.

I would love to conclude with a quote by Maya Angelou, the poet and civil rights activist, "I've learned

that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." If you want your employees to remain productive, engaged and highly motivated during these difficulty times you need to treat them well. Make them feel appreciated, respected, and safe. Remember tough times don't last, but tough people do and so does companies. The organisation survives tough times when it keeps its employees highly motivated.

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