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How to Motivate Staff With 3 Simple But Effective Strategies

🕒 Thursday, 20 December 2018 [Brett Farmiloe \(/blogger/brettfamiloe\)](#)

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Ever wonder how to inspire employees to be their most productive? Unengaged employees are more likely to look for other job opportunities and cost companies tons in lost productivity. While sometimes work ethic or personal issues may be to blame,

employers play a large role in influencing how productive their employees are. Here's how to motivate staff with 3 simple but effective strategies:

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Happy, Healthy Workers

It turns out there have been several studies to reveal what we probably have known all along. Higher happiness levels, overall mental wellbeing, and physical health all influence how hard employees work and their motivation to do so.

The University of Warwick

(https://warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/new_study_shows/) conducted a study to see whether happier employees means more productive employees. The findings revealed that happiness increased productivity rates by 12%, definitely a significant gain for employers to pay attention to. Of course, all of us can probably agree from experience that a mood boost makes us more willingly to complete even the more challenging tasks.

On the topic of health in the workplace, the U.S. Center for Disease Control Foundation (<https://www.cdcfoundation.org/businesspulse/healthy-workforce-infographic>) states that productivity losses linked to absenteeism cost employees a huge \$225.8 billion USD, which comes out to be \$1,685 USD per employee. Even those who still insist on going to work when feeling down have their productivity impacted. Presenteeism, or sick individuals who go to work, make up two-thirds of costs of worker illness. A large driving factor is that nearly 40 percent of American workers had no paid sick leave.

Of course, if not compensated, workers would rather still go to work even if they're not at their best. Rather than saving money on paid sick leave and wellness programs, employers may actually be creating an even worse problem for themselves and productivity. Apart from taking care of workers, there are a few other things employers can be doing to ensure that productivity isn't sacrificed.

Recommended reading: 5 Simple Ways To Ensure Happy Employees (/general/5-simple-ways-to-ensure-happy-employees)

How Employers Can Inspire Productivity

Scott Keller and Susie Cranston published an insightful piece in the McKinsey Quarterly (http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Organization/Change_Management/Increasing_the_meaning) how to inspire employees to work with purpose. This blog post paraphrases some of the key takeaways from the article.

Susie and Scott discuss how athletes find their sweet spot and musicians get on a roll. So how do employees experience similar performance peaks? And more importantly, what can executives do to enable that peak performance occur more often by implementing

exemplary company values (<https://yscouts.com/culture-2/top-10-core-values-medium-workplaces/>)? Rather than implement a culture of demands and seemingly unrealistic expectation, these strategies *inspire* employees to want to achieve more without force.

Here are three strategies on how to inspire employees to be their most productive

Strategy #1: Tell five stories at once

Strategy #2: Let employees 'write their own lottery ticket'

Strategy #3: Use small, unexpected rewards to motivate

Recommended reading: How to Create a Workspace that Encourages Productivity (/general/how-your-workspace-can-boost-productivity)

1. Tell Five Stories at Once

Susie and Scott state that most company higher ups try to inspire their people through two different types of speeches: the "good to great" speech or the "turnaround story." In the "good to great speech", executives lead with how much room they have for improvement. In the "turnaround story," executives kick off a talk with how a change is essential to survival. While these types of speeches might inspire some employees, they don't reach all employees. The reason is that the speeches starts with what, or how, instead of "why."

Instead, executives need to tell five stories at once by communicating to individuals the deeper meaning behind what they're trying to say. We can rename this "meaning" the "why". The "why" of employees can range across the board. Here is where the "why" comes from, and how executives can better frame their messages, according to Susie and Scott:

- Society — Creating a better society, building the community, or stewarding resources
- The Customer — Making life easier to the customer and providing a superior service or product
- The Working Team — Instilling a sense of belonging, a caring environment, or working together efficiently and effectively
- Themselves — Examples include personal development, incentives like a higher paycheck or bonus, and a sense of empowerment

To support their points, Susie and Scott introduce the story of a large financial services company that implemented a cost reduction program. Three months into the program, executives foresaw the program being unsuccessful due to employee resistance. In response, executives repositioned the story of cost reduction program. They made the message applicable to the four points above.

- Society — Community members received more affordable housing.
- Customers — Increased simplicity and flexibility, less mistakes, more competitive prices

- Working Teams — Less redundancies, more task delegation, higher accountability, a quicker pace
- Individuals — More attractive roles, a unique opportunity to build transferrable skills, a great opportunity to “make your own” organisation

The program contents were identical, but by changing the underlying message in how it was delivered to include the “why” in these four categories, employee motivation about the program increased to 57 percent from 35 percent. When employees see the importance of their own involvement in an issue, they’re more likely to own it.

2. Let Employees ‘Write Their Own Lottery Ticket’

When we make decisions for ourselves, we are more committed to the result.

Researcher Daniel Kahneman once tested a lottery. Half the participants were randomly assigned a lottery ticket. The other half was given a blank strip of paper and requested to write down a number. Shortly before selecting the winning number, researchers offered to buy back the tickets from those who possessed them. The question they wanted to answer was how much more would you have to pay people who “wrote their own number” than people who received a number randomly.

Researchers found they had to pay at least five times more to those who wrote their own number.

Executives and business leaders of course can’t afford to allow employees to make all of their decisions. However, the more involved employees can feel, the more invested they’ll become.

The head of financial services at one global bank asked all individual team members to write their own lottery ticket: what change story, in each of the businesses, supported the wider message? His team members in turn wrote change stories, shared them with their teams, and the process continued all the way to the front line. Although this method took far longer than the traditional road-show approach, the return on commitment to the program was considered well worth the investment and an important reason the bank achieved roughly two times its revenue-per-banker-improvement targets.

3. Use Small, Unexpected Rewards to Motivate

Leaders of organisations that successfully weave meaning into their messages understand the power of other strategies. Terry Burnham and Jay Phelan’s book, *Mean Genes*, outlines an experiment in which 50 percent of a group of people using a photocopier found a dime in the coin-return slot. When all were asked to rate their satisfaction level, those who got the dime scored an average of 6.5 on a scale of 1 to 7, while those who didn’t scored just 5.6.

The lesson here is that when we aren’t expecting a reward, even a small one can have a disproportionate effect on our state of mind. And that’s also true of employees in the workplace.

Inspiring employees to work more productively isn't just a benefit to companies. Motivated employees are more likely to stay at your company for longer, increasing retention, and positively impact those around them. No one wants to be surrounded by coworkers who don't want to be at their jobs. By creating a positive work environment, everyone can benefit from the domino effect of creativity.

Over to you now. Are you using any other strategies for how to motivate staff in your business? Tell us in the comments below.

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