

# The Art of Lifting Spirits

## Motivating in Good Times and Bad

Motivation is applicable to any season. Whether the economic climate brings forth thriving growth or torrential decline, motivation remains a constant essential to any manager's arsenal of employee management tools.

Knowing the right approach in which to apply them is the key to maintaining a workforce that is productive, proactive, engaged and most importantly, impervious to any economic situation. In reality, it does not take a lot of effort to motivate well. It just starts with looking at things in a certain way.

### **Presenting positivity: a matter of perspective**

Everybody loves good news, and in good times, facts flow freely and uninhibited because they directly effectuate high spirits. But when the tables are turned and bad sentiments dominate headlines, leaders often find themselves caught tempted to sweeten facts or water down figures in order to retain positivity among employees.

- However, no one can escape from hard facts. And any form of distortion from the truth, no matter how minute, could backfire and cause more damage than originally anticipated. Employees are quick to pick up any form of discrepancy in what is told to them, which could potentially end up in a far greater degree of distrust and dissent.

Instead, leaders should do the reverse and tackle any negative issue head on. Even if a sure solution has not been thought out, the strongest influencer of how employees react is not in the message itself, but the implicit confidence that is conveyed especially in the face of uncertainty.

Show that the management is honest and on top of things by presenting bad news in its full gravity. Once employees feel part of formulating the solution, the same degree of confidence displayed would trickle down and spread like wildfire. It is through positive perceptions of unfavourable situations that the best solutions emerge.

### **The toolbox of motivation**

So it is understood that motivation is an essential management tool that transcends seasons. But it is much easier said than done. It requires a leader who is able to rise above situations and his or her feelings in order to effectively steer their subordinates in a positive direction. Here are three fundamental tactics that leaders can adopt in their missions to motivate:

**Communicate** – Leaders very often make the mistake of second guessing their employees' intelligence and capacity for composure. Typically, leaders are a lot slower and discreet about communicating unfavourable news, such as poor performance or impending job cuts, for fear that a panic-stricken staff force would lead to unmanageable chaos among the more populous ranks. In fact, clear and straight communication could turn a bad situation into a rallying flag by making a problem everybody's unified responsibility.

Communication is a two-way process, which means that conveying messages with all the tact in the world is not enough to evoke a sense of inclusivity. Listening, acknowledging and acting on feedback are communicative elements that make subordinates feel like their thoughts and inputs matter. Besides boosting their sense of worth, the simple act of listening would propel them to continue taking a positive and proactive attitude in any future issue.

**Involve** – Good leaders do not simply draw up paths of execution and expect their prescribed solutions to be followed without question. In fact, the best leaders acknowledge that their juniors, being closer to the ground, would have view points and direct experience that would be invaluable to the problem-solving process.

Beyond creating channels that encourage input, employees should be directly involved in solution-forming and execution as much as their capabilities allow them to be. The more a leader adopts the role of a facilitator and supervisor instead of a commander, the more his or her staff would feel motivated to perform for the company.

**Appreciate** – In sales, repeat customers flock back to a brand in droves when they feel that their purchase has been appreciated or rewarded through after-sales care and support or loyalty programmes.

In the same sense, employees want to feel valued for their work and effort, and recognised for having been instrumental to the problems that are solved. Appreciation does not even have to be attached with a monetary value. A simple thank-you note or an appraisal in front of the department can work wonders to a staff member's pride and motivation. It could also inspire others around to strive for similar degrees of excellence as well.

### **Motivated staff starts with a motivated leader**

In conclusion, the uplifting power of motivation can determine the solidarity of a company in both good times and bad. But even before a leader can attempt to motivate his subordinates, he or she has to first be motivated.

- Therefore, leaders need a higher-than-usual level of resilience in the face of even the worst situations.
- And as the world faces the most severe economic crisis in recent history, leaders from the smallest companies to the biggest nations would undoubtedly be faced with a test of their own motivation. Ultimately, the rise and fall of corporations in the wake of this current downturn could be down to a matter motivation.

*This article is contributed by Ms Alma Othman.*