

10 warning signs of low morale ... and 8 ways to boost it

Without you realizing it, low morale can creep into your organization. Check every day to make sure people stay in tune. Here are 10 sour notes to listen for, according to the new book *Leadership When the Heat's On*:

- 1. Uncooperative attitudes.** These are easily detected, even if you can't tell what's wrong right off.
- 2. Lack of enthusiasm.** This is different from an uncooperative attitude. If they're bored, they're not sold on the mission.
- 3. Absence of commitment.** If the leaders don't believe in it, do you think employees will?
- 4. Fault-finding.** People can find fault in anything, but when they do work they believe in with co-workers they trust, it doesn't happen.
- 5. Increasing complaints.** By the time you become aware of complaints, the situation is pretty bad.
- 6. Growing tardiness and absenteeism.** These are grounds for disciplinary action, but they also trigger an alarm for the astute leader.
- 7. Deterioration in the appearance of the work area.** Some people are naturally neat or messy, but you can tell if it gets worse.
- 8. Breakdown in discipline.** Again, the thing to watch for is change.
- 9. Chronic long faces.** You know your people enough to know when individual situations are different from unhappy looks on everyone every day.
- 10. When low morale becomes a rallying point.** If people form a consensus about how lousy their employer is and discuss it openly, you've got serious trouble.

True story: During a flight delay, attendants pulled the curtain but still could be clearly heard renouncing their loyalty to the airline and trying to top each others' ugly stories. One passenger, a former test pilot, thought: "Now might be a good time to develop a fear of flying." The passenger next to him turned out to be in charge of customer service for that airline, and said she never passed customer complaints upward because she was instructed not to.

Bottom line: To be effective, you need real feedback and solutions, no matter how painful.

8 morale boosters to try now

If you notice a good number of these signals in your workplace, now's the time to use a little creativity to reward workers.

Here are a few ideas from Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who writes on the *Harvard Business Review* blog:

1. **Time.** Extend a deadline, cancel a routine meeting or send folks home early.
2. **Glee.** Hire a local high school jazz band or glee club to come perform—for a low, low price.
3. **Name recognition.** Name a hallway after a standout employee, posting signs with his or her name.
4. **Serve it up.** Have senior executives prepare breakfast, park cars or deliver mail.
5. **Memories.** Frame a photo from an event and send it, along with a note, to a team.
6. **Rule suspension.** Have a rule that everyone hates? Suspend it for the day or week.
7. **Handwritten note.** Write about how a worker has made a difference, and send it to family members.
8. **Convenience.** Save employees' time by bringing in a service, such as a dry-cleaning delivery.