

10 warning signs of low morale ... and 7 ways to boost it

Low morale can easily creep into a department without supervisors realizing it. But once it's there, it's hard to root out.

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 immediately tell what's wrong.
- 2. Lack of enthusiasm.** 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? Show employees that you're committed to the team and the mission.
- 4. Fault-finding.** People can find fault in anything, but when they do work they believe in with co-workers they trust, it rarely happens.
- 5. Increasing complaints.** Don't shrug off any complaints. Nip them before they become a trend ... or an epidemic.
- 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 well enough to know whether they're just having a bad day or suffering through a bad workplace.
- 10. When low morale becomes a rallying point.** If people form a consensus about a complaint and discuss it openly, you've got trouble. Don't let it get this far.

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 other's ugly stories. One passenger thought: "Now might be a good time to develop a fear of flying." The passenger next to him turned out to be a customer service employee for that airline, but 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.

Morale boosters to try now

If you notice a good number of those 10 signals in your workplace, now's the time to use a little creativity to reach out to workers.

Here are a few ideas from the *Harvard Business Review* blog:

- 1. Time.** Extend a deadline, cancel a routine meeting or send folks home early.
- 2. Name recognition.** Name a hallway after a standout employee, posting signs with his or her name.
- 3. Serve it up.** Do some special service work for your team, maybe with a surprise breakfast one morning.
- 4. Memories.** Frame a photo from an event and send it, along with a note, to your staff.
- 5. Rule suspension.** Have a rule that everyone doesn't like? Suspend it for the day or week, or consider eliminating the rule if it's useless.
- 6. Handwritten note.** Write about how a worker has made a difference, and send it to family members.
- 7. Convenience.** Save employees' time by bringing in a service, such as a dry-cleaning delivery.