

# Out of the doldrums: How to motivate employees and rekindle career passion

With January behind us, it's easy for the energy that the new year brings begins to - even in the first quarter. So how do you motivate employees to prevent the slump? And what about seasoned employees? You know that holding the same job for several years often resembles involvement in a long-term romantic relationship. Comfortable with where things stand, operating on autopilot becomes easy. The familiarity and routine can make a person passively content, but it also can produce boredom or longing for something more.

Just as partners benefit from checking with one another to gauge fulfillment levels and figure out how to grow together, managers who take an interest in maintaining a passionate staff reap great rewards.

"Simply put, happy and fulfilled employees do better work," says Kristen J. Zavo, author of *Job Joy: Your Guide to Success, Meaning, and Happiness in Your Career*. "They're more productive, collaborative, creative, and willing to go the extra mile."

They also tend to stick around, which is good news for leaders wishing to avoid the cost and disruption of turnover.

Ready to rekindle the spark in your workers? Try these ideas:

## **Investigate what gets the person excited**

Talk with team members individually about professional goals. Chances are they'll become chatty and visibly enthusiastic about certain issues during the conversation. Run with those interests, and offer support such as training, visibility, and office resources.

"Ask them what they enjoy most about their job and what is their least favorite part of the job," suggests executive coach and career strategist Elizabeth Koraca. "Then, strategize a way to give them more of what they love and less of what they don't love."

## **Assign something different**

When first hired, each day consists of mastering new skills. With the passage of time, fewer opportunities generally exist for workers to face challenges and gain the pride that comes with succeeding at something outside of one's comfort zone.

Shake up the status quo from time to time by presenting workers with an alternative. They'll benefit from the mental stimulation of learning something new, and you'll gain a more versatile staff.

Similarly, partnering people differently for projects or brainstorming sessions breaks monotony. Atypical interactions foster fresh perspectives and may result in improved communication and bonds.

## **Give regular feedback**

Bosses keep an eye on new employees to judge their performance and offer encouragement. Seasoned workers, however, may fall off the radar until a problem arises or an annual review comes up. Such situations become a breeding ground for mediocrity.

Combat this scenario by offering appreciation and constructive criticism on a consistent basis. Clear guidance helps people know what they can improve upon and excel at, and heart-felt words show efforts are noticed.

## **Point out purpose**

Feeling that what they do truly makes a difference inspires greater commitment and energy from staff. Thus, make sure team members realize their own importance.

“I recommend sharing the bigger picture with them—not just telling them what to do, but why and how it supports the goals of the team and the organization,” Zavo says.

Echoes Koraca, “When everyone understands the ‘why’ of what they are doing and the purpose behind it, you are setting your employees up for success in achieving these goals.”

## **Encourage relaxation**

Simply stated, everybody needs time to recharge. Workers who remain connected to the office 24/7, fail to take lunch breaks, or don’t use their entitled vacation time aren’t superstars—they’re disasters waiting to happen. As Koraca notes, “How can you be passionate about what you do if you are burnt out?”

## **Monitor your own passion level**

Finally, realize that a dedicated manager who puts her heart and soul into tasks sets an awesome example and encourages others to perform the same way. Spend time figuring out how to revamp your own passion for your industry and company. Bringing a smile to your face is reason enough to do so, but the ripple effect to your team is icing on the cake.