

Employee burnout prevention: How to motivate employees

Employee burnout and disengagement can be hard to extinguish once it sets in, but managers who understand what motivates employees—and what derails it—can proactively build teams that stay energized by their work. Here are three reasons motivated employees lose interest in their jobs, and how you can intervene before all motivation is lost.

Motivation killer #1

"This job doesn't match my values anymore."

All employees (and managers) have intrinsic and extrinsic values that contribute to how well they perform in a job, and how happy they are doing the work. Intrinsic values might include helping others, being creative or feeling challenged. Extrinsic values drive an employee to accept a role and stay in it, like a perceived power associated with a title or compensation.

When an employee's role somehow changes or the priorities of the company no longer align with his values, motivation suffers.

What managers can do

Use employee one-on-ones as an opportunity to have ongoing conversations about the employee's perception of the work he does and how it aligns with his values. When employees describe their wins or challenges over the past few weeks, dig deeper into what made one project rewarding, or another less than fulfilling. An employee who enjoys creative freedom, for example, may share that he feels stifled by projects that involve direction, changes or similar feedback from multiple stakeholders. An employee who enjoys collaborating may express feelings of isolation if tasked with projects that involve autonomy. Your proactivity in helping to manage the employee's workload to include more projects that align with his values than don't can help him remain engaged, even if every task isn't 100% aligned with what he loves to do.

Motivation killer #2

"I can't do this."

Pushing employees out of their comfort zone can help some team members realize they are far more capable than they thought, but not all employees will believe they have the skills they need to do work that's new to them. Instead, these employees will usually procrastinate the task or find reasons why they can't take it on. Eventually, they'll lose the motivation to want to do it all.

What managers can do

Coach employees who will be pushed outside of their comfort zone with what to expect; offer tools, courses or best practices that could help them feel prepared to take on work that may not be familiar. Some employees

may indeed require additional training or skills development, but others may simply need help believing they are the right person for the job. Help these employees build their confidence by checking in with their progress regularly and offering to help them navigate roadblocks that arise. Eventually, they may embrace the change and know that they can do more than they believed possible.

Motivation killer #3

"I don't know why every project I'm in has issues."

Some workplace cultures simply are not a good fit for the employee. An employee who loves independent work, for example, will be frustrated by a collaborative culture. One who values process will struggle with a chaotic workplace that lacks procedures and plans. But an employee who once thrived in your work environment and then stops might simply be losing motivation when challenges or perceived failures constantly seem to arise, without clear cause.

What managers can do

Ask the employee to detail the events and challenges that led up to the projects she perceived as being full of issues. As you talk through them, pose questions about which elements were really out of her control, and which she might have been able to manage with a different approach. Helping a frustrated employee see that she has more power than she realizes can renew her motivation and empower her to enact positive change in the company, and for other members of the team.