

Root out demotivators

Like pesky ants, demotivators can infest your workplace and prove hard to eliminate. They rarely disappear on their own, which means you must take steps to root them out.

Most demotivators—or performance inhibitors that seep into the corporate culture— do not occur overnight. They affect employees a little at a time, gradually chipping away at workers' willingness to stay positive or give their boss (or employer) the benefit of the doubt.

Here are some of the most common demotivators, along with preventive steps you can take to protect your unit from losing its way:

Petty politics. When employees complain of office politics, they're usually upset with some perceived unfairness in hiring, pay or promotions. This unhappiness, in turn, becomes an excuse not to give the organization 100 percent. You can never totally stop political battles, but you can foster a climate of openness and unclog channels of communication. Solution: Meet with your staff and raise the issues that have led to political squabbling. Review why a new hotshot manager was hired, update everyone on the status of salary freezes or incentive pay plans and level with the group about any swirling rumors. Promise that if your employees talk to you privately, they'll hear the exact same message.

Constant disruptive change. Everyone knows that change in today's workplace is constant. That's fine, but what demotivates workers is when the frequency of change breeds cynicism or calls into question the willingness of top management to stick with a plan for any reasonable length of time. Solution: Choose your change campaigns carefully and present time frames for evaluating any new programs or procedures. Then follow through before you call it quits or try something else.

Lack of feedback. Among the most frequent complaints we hear from employees is that they just don't know what their boss thinks of their performance. When an individual toils day after day without any input on how they're doing, it creates a situation that's ripe for demotivation. Solution: Create a grid of every employee who reports directly to you. Whenever you give praise (or any supportive, constructive feedback) to someone, remember to make a check by that person's name. Review your sheet each month to confirm you don't have any employees without checks by their names.