

Motivating Employees

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Tony is 19 years old. He came to this country when he was 11, never graduated from high school, and only has a rudimentary grasp of English. Tony works on one of your crews. He is a good worker, is seldom late, and hardly ever complains. You can feel it though: He is not going to be at your establishment very long. He will pick up a few dollars and then move on—to where, you will never know.

Can you increase the job length of stay for workers like Tony? Indeed, can you motivate someone who, quite bluntly, toils for long hours for little reward? The answer is a resounding yes. It will require a little effort and ingenuity on your part; still, after all is said and done, Tony and others in his situation may still depart on short or no notice. The odds that they will remain with the job longer, however, will increase if you follow some of these guidelines for motivating these employees.

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE. You need to check your attitude before any motivation program can succeed. As humans, we broadcast all the time. What are you broadcasting to your crews? That they are replaceable? That you are not concerned with their needs?

It's easy for the supervisor who has watched dozens of laborers come and go to develop quickly the view that, "It's the nature of the business, why fight it?" It is that attitude that partially perpetuates the massive turnover in the industry. Resolve here and now that you can take measures to increase the average longevity of low-paid laborers, and that your attitude and initiative do make a difference.

AN ENCOURAGING WORD. How long would it take you to learn some key phrases in the language of your low-paid laborers? Whether they speak Spanish, Vietnamese, or Korean, it won't take long to master some short conversational pleasantries. Many

bookstores are stocked with dictionaries providing various language translations. Even easier, sit down with one of your key crew members and on a paper jot down the phonetic spelling of phrases such as "How are you," and "You're doing a good job."

UNANNOUNCED BREAKS. Periodically throughout the day, and particularly on challenging days, give your workers unannounced breaks. Aug-

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ment these mini vacations by distributing snacks. The few dollars you may spend will pay off in terms of greater productivity that day. These breaks will also enhance longevity among low-paid crew members. It pays off to offer little perks.

ROTATING LEADERSHIP. Rotate leadership among some crews. For instance, on four consecutive days, make sure that crew members each have one day as "foreman." For some of your workers, this may represent their first taste of leadership. Rotating leadership is most effective when the crew members are unfamiliar with each other.

Among crew members familiar with each other, however, this may be harder to implement as some individuals naturally exert dominance over others.

AWARDS SYSTEM. Make "contests" short in duration and high on visuals. For example, you could keep a chart on the wall or other visible location indicating who has had the most consecutive days without being absent or tardy. Which crew performances have prompted words of praise from custom-

ers? Who has gone above and beyond the call of duty in the last week? You can easily chart and readily display these achievements to crew members.

People like to see their names on a chart followed by stars or other performance indicators. The chart could be language proof, for instance. Everyone recognizes their own name in English, and stars or dollar signs can indicate the bonuses you'll offer.

After posting the charts, set up a simple system of rewards, which could include cash or more time as a team leader.

MENTORS. Look for leaders among your crew members who can serve as mentors to newly hired staff. This alleviates having to break in each crew member. Those individuals selected as mentors will be pleased with this special status and will not only assist in achieving smoother operations, but will help alleviate quick departures among new employees.

Here is a checklist to help you determine if you are raising or lowering morale, increasing or decreasing crew members' length of stay, and serving as a leader, not just as a manager:

- Do I make sure employees understand how to properly complete a job?
- Have I clearly indicated what results I expect?
- Do I offer adequate and ongoing support?
- Do I cultivate positive relationships?
- Do I show concern for crew members as individuals?
- Have I established appropriate recognition and reward systems?
- Do I take the time both to learn and to dispense some encouraging phrases for enhanced communication?

Even if you practice all of the above recommendations, you still will not eliminate quick turnover or enhance crew motivation. Yet, if you can induce the low-paid employee to stay on an extra week or encourage crew members to finish a big job on time, then you have made your job a little easier, and have contributed to the profitability and long-term viability of the company.