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You Can Make Their Day: Four Tips for the Leader About Employee Motivation

By Susan M. Heathfield,

You can make their day or break their day. Your choice. No kidding. Other than the decisions individuals make on their own about liking their work, you are the most powerful factor in employee motivation and morale.

As a manager or supervisor, your impact on employee motivation is immeasurable. By your words, your body language, and the expression on your face, as a manager, supervisor, or leader, you telegraph your opinion of their value to the people you employ.

Feeling valued by their supervisor in the workplace is key to high employee motivation and morale. Feeling valued ranks right up there for most people with liking the work, competitive pay, opportunities for training and advancement, and feeling "in" on the latest news.

Building high employee motivation and morale is both challenging and yet supremely simple. Building high employee motivation and morale requires that you pay attention every day to profoundly meaningful aspects of your impact on life at work.

Your Arrival at Work Sets the Employee Motivation Tone for the Day

Picture Mr. Stressed-Out and Grumpy. He arrives at work with a frown on his face. His body language telegraphs "over-worked" and unhappy. He moves slowly and treats the first person who approaches him abruptly. It takes only a few minutes for the entire workplace to get the word. Stay away from Mr. Stressed-Out and Grumpy if you know what's good for you this morning.

Your arrival and the first moments you spend with staff each day have an immeasurable impact on positive employee motivation and morale. Start the day right. Smile. Walk tall and confidently. Walk around your workplace and greet people. Share the goals and expectations for the day. Let the staff know that today is going to be a great day. It starts with you. You can make their day.

Use Simple, Powerful Words for Employee Motivation

Sometimes in my work, I get gifts. I recently interviewed an experienced supervisor for a position open at a client company. She indicated that she was popular with the people at her former company as evidenced by employees wanting to work on her shift.

Responding to my question, she said that part of her success was that she liked and appreciated people. She sent the right message. She also uses simple, powerful, motivational words to demonstrate she values people. She says "please" and "thank you" and "you're doing a good job." How often do you take the time to use these simple, powerful words, and others like them, in your interaction with staff? You can make their day.

For Employee Motivation, Make Sure People Know What You Expect

In the best book I've read on the subject, *Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed to Do and What to Do about It* by Ferdinand Fournies, setting clear expectations is often a supervisor's first failure. Supervisors think they have clearly stated work objectives, numbers needed, report deadlines and requirements, but the employee received a different message.

Or, the requirements change in the middle of the day, job, or project. While the new expectations are communicated - usually poorly - the reason for the change or the context for the change is rarely discussed. This causes staff members to think that the company leaders don't know what they are doing. This is hardly a confidence, morale-building feeling.

This is bad news for employee motivation and morale. Make sure you get feedback from the employee so you know he understands what you need. Share the goals and reasons for doing the task or project. In a manufacturing environment, don't emphasize just numbers if you want a quality product finished quickly. If you must make a change midway through a task or a project, tell the staff why the change is needed; tell them everything you know. You can make their day.

Provide Regular Feedback for Employee Motivation

When I poll supervisors, the motivation and morale builder they identify first is knowing how they are doing at work. Your staff members need the same information. They want to know when they have done a project well and when you are disappointed in their results. They need this information as soon as possible following the event.

They need to work with you to make sure they produce a positive outcome the next time. Set up a daily or weekly schedule and make sure feedback happens. You'll be surprised how effective this tool can be in building employee motivation and morale. You can make their day.