

10 Top Tips to Motivating to Improve Productivity

We are living in an uncertain world and uncertainty generally has a negative effect on people also, they fear for their jobs, their health, their mortgage etc. Also more and more organisations are being asked to do more with less. This can result in reduced motivation, innovation and productivity, things a business really needs in such times. So how do you keep your team motivated to perform? Here are a few simple tips.

1. Understand what makes people tick

Workplace negativity and lack of motivation can be the result of many things such as management decisions impacting negatively on staff, staff insecurity, fear or rumour of redundancy or unfair treatment. The first step to motivating people is to reduce these causes as much as possible. This is about influencing the environment that people work in and provide greater security and feeling of contentment.

To motivate people to improve productivity you need to go further and make them want to go that extra mile for you. Motivation impels people to action and the aim of motivation is to maximise the effective use of people to achieve organisational and employee needs. To do this you need to work out what makes people tick, what they like and want/don't want. You need to influence the individual. The aim is to make where you want them to be seem more attractive than where they are or make where they are less comfortable than it is now. You want them to want to do things not just because someone else wants them to do it.

There are several theories of motivation such as Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' looking at physical, security, social, recognition and self-fulfillment needs, and Herzberg's 'Two-factor theory' of job motivators and the employment environment or hygiene factors. Not everyone fits nicely into these sorts of theory and they are general and not geared to the individual or necessarily the working environment. To make them work in an employment setting you must find out what people's individual needs are so you need to know your people.

It is the fish who decide the bait, not the angler. We need to ask the fish what they would prefer to nibble" - Derek Robinson, Economist.

At appraisal time find out what policies, procedures, systems, goals/targets etc. are a problem to employees, what reduces their effectiveness and motivation. Take time out to discover people's interests, hobbies, family life etc. so you can get an idea of things that might make them more motivated.

Don't forget, a satisfied need is no longer a motivator so you need to constantly be checking on what people's needs are and adjusting your motivators accordingly.

2. Ensure employees understand their role

Make sure everyone is on the same page and working towards the same vision and goals. Give them opportunities to discuss and contribute to individual and team aims and objectives to get greater engagement with, and understanding of, the end result. The team needs to work together but if they don't all agree what the goal is and what part they play they will pull in different directions and nothing will be achieved. Everyone needs to know what they are doing, where they stand and who they can turn to if they need help. Get everyone together and spell things out from the start, emphasise the team needs to work together and they are all responsible.

Ensure they know **and** understand what is expected of them. This needs to be explicit and clear and their understanding needs to be checked as different people can interpret the same thing in different ways, including how much control they themselves have in any given situation. A lot of mistakes and problems can be averted if people are told exactly what to do and what not to do right from the start.

Match people to jobs. Ensure that all team members have the skills and ability to deliver to the objectives and expectations indicated. Also ensure that they know that they are supported by the organisation in developing the capacity to meet the expectations if they can't already. There is no point in trying to get people to do something they just aren't equipped to do, they will be doomed to failure no matter how well you motivate them.

Identify those who can be delegated specific tasks and empower them to take on these tasks but emphasise the limits of their responsibilities and the chain of command to go through and the lines of communication that they need to use if in doubt. If one person oversteps their level of authority it can have a significant demotivating effect on the rest of the team. Also check they are happy to be delegated to, some people just don't want extra responsibility and forcing them will have a negative effect on them.

3. Agree SMARTER objectives

For any team to function properly you need to have aims and objectives or goals. They need to be what the organisation needs and stretch people and get them out of their comfort zone, but if they are not achievable people will not see the point of trying and will give up as it is pre-determined they will fail.

Make sure any targets are **SMARTER**.

- Specific – with clear activities identified and specific goals to aim for or results to be achieved or a description of the conditions that will exist when the desired outcome has been accomplished.
- Measurable – you must be able to measure your performance towards the goals so you can identify snagging points or impediments as well as successes.
- Achievable – the targets need to stretch people but still be attainable with effort otherwise they make no sense at all and it is worth considering including an indication of the resources available to help achieve the target so people see there is support there.
- Relevant – they need to be what the organisation needs and this correlation needs to be demonstrated to people otherwise they will not see why they need to bother.
- Time bound – you need a time frame for which the outcome needs to be completed otherwise things will drag on and on and never be completed leading to lack of engagement and demotivation.
- Evaluated – goals and objectives need to be constantly evaluated to check they still meet the SMART criteria and if they don't then they need to be -
- Refreshed – make them SMART again.

Once you have got your SMART objectives ask employees opinions on them to check they really are SMART in terms of operational, resource and personnel capacity. They may come up with suggestions to make them even SMARTER and they may surprise you and raise the bar without being told to.

When the objectives have been finalised again go back to the team and explain them fully and get them to agree to working to them. If you have involved them in the process from the start then they should all be happy to agree to work to them as they 'own them'.

4. Give and receive regular, constructive feedback

Make sure you keep in touch with the team and know when people are struggling. Things may start off ok but as time goes on with people working at a constantly high level, some may start to burn out. Make sure you give them the support and encouragement they need, don't let them flounder as this will lead to them disengaging or giving up. Nothing motivates people more than on-going feedback, it doesn't have to be left to review time.

In order to be able to give feedback you need to observe the individuals performance. Don't look for mistakes, instead look for areas for improvement, it is a good idea to use the PRICE cycle. Pinpoint what the problem is, what are the areas that need improvement. Record them over a suitable timeframe and in detail so they can be referred to easily. Involve the employee in developing solutions so they have full buy in to the process. Coach the employee in the required standards of performance so they know you are there to help and support them. Finally Evaluate if the remedial measures have been successful, if not then you will need to start the cycle again with pinpointing why there is still an issue.

When you are giving constructive feedback don't forget to use PUBS but that doesn't mean take them for a drink! Be Positive and highlight good work etc. Make sure the feedback is Useful and not just a telling off. Make the feedback Behaviour focussed rather than individual actions or mistakes and finally make it Specific. Don't just say you're not working at your best buck up, give specific examples (remember Pinpoint).

Don't forget feedback isn't only for when performance is poor it is also for when you catch them doing things right. This is really motivational as many people feel their efforts go unseen so if you do see someone doing a good job, say so, and finish with 'keep it up'.

Finally, a good manager or team leader will welcome feedback from team members on their performance, no one is perfect all the time and poor leadership can have serious consequences on the motivation of others.

5. Monitor outcomes not just outputs

Outputs are usually the targets that people are set and in a lot of businesses these are seen as the same as outcomes and they are the most important thing. But sometimes they aren't and if you focus too much on outputs, especially if they are consistently hard to achieve or they aren't SMARTER, then people will quickly become demoralised and productivity will drop. This will result in an endless spiral downwards if not addressed.

Sometimes it is worth taking a step back and looking at the bigger and long-term picture. Of course people need to meet the targets and these need to be monitored but you also need to monitor the human and other factors around them. Outputs meet strategic and business goals it's true but how you get those outputs and maintain them is important too as are things that come from activity around the targets.

If the only thing people are working for and monitored on is meeting targets, then they will settle into a regime where they are more like robots than people. This can lead quickly into either stagnant or reduced productivity. Look outside the box and see what other outcomes have been achieved, or could be achieved, whilst working towards the targets, as in the long run they can be more productive.

Have people developed new innovative ways of working which make processes more efficient or save the organisation money? Have problems been identified that hinder outputs and cost the organisation money? These should be investigated and encouraged to enable the team and organisation to benefit. They will also help keep employees motivated by showing that you are interested in their ideas and will support positive ones.

Are staff off less or more frequently. If they are off more frequently you need to investigate this further as there could be health & safety or stress related issues that need addressing further or they could escalate.

If people are off less it could be that you have the balance right, they are motivated and the productivity level is sustainable. Don't rest on your laurels. Maybe consider increasing the targets just slightly to stretch people a little further and thereby increase productivity without demotivating.

6. Give people space

One of the hardest things for many managers or team leaders is to step back and let the team get on with things. The temptation is to set down a whole raft of rules and procedures and task people to stick to them like glue whether they want to or not. This is a disastrous way to do things and is a key demotivator.

There do need to be procedures and policies but these shouldn't just be imposed on the individuals. You need to involve them from the start to help develop the policies and procedures and agree the outputs before the team starts working towards the targets. That way team members will know where they stand and that you are there if they need you.

This doesn't mean that you let them dictate everything, you still need to be strong but also engage active listening and include their suggestions, ideas and new thinking. If you have to say no, explain why and if assumptions are creeping in challenge them. This way they will feel empowered, engaged and will be more willing to adapt positively to the new way of working.

You need to trust the team members to do the work they are assigned in the most efficient and successful way they can. It is also about you trusting them to keep to the organisations policies and procedures, including health and safety, and about them trusting you to ensure the right policies and procedures are in place to protect them and that if things go wrong you will be there for them.

Trust needs to be earned by all sides and this can be multi-faceted involving individual team members, team leaders and management. Each needs to trust that the others will do what they are supposed to do and in turn will back each other up as required.

So don't look over people's shoulders, don't micro manage, give them space. Trust employees to deliver agreed outputs and outcomes, but maintain regular contact so you can spot problems before they become serious and so they can see you are supporting them. They will be more inclined to do their best as they feel valued and respected.

7. Empower staff

Over time, there has been a shift in focus away from the measurement of individual output to inform performance development or pay decisions, towards a greater emphasis on individual contribution to organisational objectives through behaviour and capability as well as output.

As such, performance management is now as much about driving engagement and collecting information and data to provide better insight into the drivers of performance as it is about providing information about individuals.

Empowerment is about enabling or giving authority for an individual to think, behave, take action, and control work and decision-making about their job in an independent, self-directed way, letting them take control of the destiny.

A key aspect of empowerment is listening to everyone and making them feel valued, important and appreciated. Listening to what they have to say with an open mind and not being dismissive will encourage them to share ideas and better ways of working and will encourage them to go that bit further. As they say two heads are better than one. The aim is to help them to deliver to their full potential by giving them confidence, responsibility, and support.

Demonstrate trust in your staff (remember point 6) by giving them the outputs required but then let them decide on the means to get there in their own way. Don't just delegate the drudge work, delegate some of the fun or more responsible work as well. This could include asking someone to step in and lead a team meeting while you step out for a while.

Employees learning a new skill is good for the organisation as a whole. It also doesn't have to always be work related. You could allow someone off half an hour early to do some out of work activity that benefits them and could benefit the organisation. A word of warning you do need to make sure you do this fairly for all employees and don't have 'favourites'.

The aim is to give the employees the right information, confidence and support to make their own decisions about certain aspects of their job. You want them to want to do things because they feel they can.

8. Conduct relevant appraisal interviews

People need to be able to learn and develop effectively in order to cope with the rapidly changing requirements of today's world of work. Companies need systems to help focus training and coaching effort and remove barriers to employee effectiveness.

Performance Appraisal is designed to cover all of the above, but it is often avoided, hated when mentioned, and dreaded by all involved. It gives HR people nightmares too! This is because employees often see it as checking up on them to find fault and get more work out of them and managers see it as a chore with the potential for employees to bring discrimination or harassment claims against them.

Appraisals should not be like this. The whole purpose should be about the manager and the employee identifying together areas which are ok and areas that need improvement to the benefit of all concerned.

There are many forms of appraisal system such as self appraisal, 360 degree, manager led, peer and team, and the one you choose needs to be appropriate to the organisation and the individual. They should not be seen as an opportunity to berate the employee they should be approached in a positive manner by all participants and consist of the following key features.

- Before an appraisal interview gather as much information as you can about the employee, their job, their performance and their personality.
- During the interview start by establishing a rapport and let the employee talk. Ask questions and most importantly **listen**.
- Discuss the objectives and how the employee is finding working to them. Identify problems and successes.
- Make plenty of factual and evidenced notes which ideally should be agreed by the employee.
- Give praise and recognition where appropriate. Accentuate the positives.
- Identify potential areas for improvement and get the employee to agree to them.
- Develop an Action Plan for addressing improvement areas with appropriate training and development interventions. Get the employee to agree to undertake the plan.
- After the interview monitor future performance against the Action Plan and if it isn't coming up to scratch, deal with it according to your organisations policy.

9. Address underperformance quickly

Any organisation should have performance improvement throughout it in respect of individual, team and organisational effectiveness. Unless there is continuous development of individuals and teams, performance will not improve. Ensuring that individuals are encouraged to behave in a way that allows and fosters better working relationships is paramount

There are 2 ways to deal with underperformance.

Option 1 Make where you want them to be seem more attractive than where they are.

Option 2 Make where they are less comfortable than it is now.

You need to develop systems to monitor and evaluate progress to outputs which should be communicated to all those involved. The emphasis should not be about punishing those who don't perform but more about helping employees to perform well and continually improve their performance.

A good system will:

- Ensure they are on track
- Ensure they **know** they are on track
- Ensure **you** know which track they are on
- Allow time to discuss problems
- Allow time to review progress and provide constructive feedback
- Recognise and reward good performance

Any under performance needs to be dealt with quickly and fairly in order to protect the team as a whole. Here are some pointers for when things go wrong;

- Attack the problem not the person.
- Be factual not subjective and focus on reasons not statements. You need to know specifics which can be 'seen' or quantified.
- Ask questions to gain as much information as possible and summarise (a lot) to ensure both sides understand.
- Be open about thoughts and feelings. Give yours first and then **listen** to theirs, it may change your viewpoint.
- Get them to say yes to something. Agreement on one small thing is a step in the right direction.
- Establish your best alternative to agreement. Most of life is about finding the best alternative so have in mind what you would be happy with.
- If necessary agree to disagree. Sometimes people's views are so different that they will never agree, accept it, it is a fact of life and move on.
- If you are wrong, say so quickly and clearly.
- Be prepared to take it outside (to coffee)! or bring in outside help.

10. Recognise and reward

It's always nice to get appreciation of a job well done. It doesn't have to be monetary, a simple thank you goes a long way. If you recognise achievements, even with a simple well done, people are more likely to remain loyal and engaged, and will encourage others to do their best. They will go into the next task feeling good about the last.

The classic way to recognise and reward people who have achieved or surpassed their targets is through performance related pay. Supporters believe that it helps motivate people in their work, delivers the message that performance is important and it is a fair way to reward people for their performance. However, critics say that these days other factors motivate more, performance assessments are often subjective, the individualistic nature inhibits teamwork and such systems lead to short-termism rather than a sustainable culture of performance improvement.

So what alternatives to performance related pay are there?

- Competence-related pay, which provides for pay progression to be linked to individual competence levels using a competence profile or framework.
- Team-based pay, a kind of PRP for teams;
- Contribution-related pay, which might involve linking pay to competence as well as results.

However, these are still cash related and some organisations can't afford to provide these cash incentives, here are some simpler alternatives to recognise improvements or targets met.

- More variety / responsibility
- Less variety / responsibility
- Light duties
- Choose a job title
- More of what they like
- Less of what they don't like
- New activities to get their teeth into
- New learning opportunities
- Time off
- Team outing, especially if it was a team effort that yielded the results
- Freebies from the company or suppliers that employees might like
- Cream cakes or other treats but check for specific dietary requirements etc.
- Gifts but make sure they are appropriate to the person and don't offend them in any way
- Publicity on noticeboards, organisational magazine etc.
- A Thank You note

The important thing for any reward scheme is to make sure it is fair to everyone and nice for those in receipt. The key here is to go back to what makes people tick and find out what they would like. Not everyone is motivated by money, especially if the task is complicated.

At Pet&r we have many years of experience of helping teams of all kinds develop and work better and this includes helping motivate team members. We have developed a 1 day training course designed to give new and established team managers the skills and knowledge to successfully develop SMART objectives and understand what motivates employees and how organisations can harness this motivation to increase productivity and attain organisational objectives. The main focus is on managing people, maintaining trust, resolving performance issues, and enabling personal development. For more information contact lynne@petandr.co.uk.