

# The Five Secrets Of Motivation Revealed

*Managers must dig deep to understand how to keep employees working at their peak.*

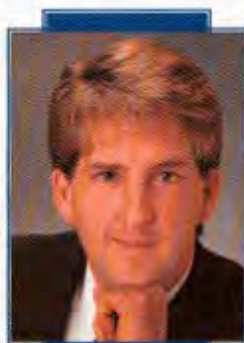
**L**OOKING FOR NEW WAYS to motivate and inspire your employees? These days, most savvy managers know that it takes more than a pat on the back and a holiday bonus to keep employees motivated, engaged and productive throughout the year. They also know that the more engaged and productive the workforce is, the greater the impact will be on the company's bottom line.

With an increasingly diverse workforce, managers have had to dig even deeper to uncover the secrets of how to keep their employees performing at peak levels. Motivating factors can be as diverse as each employee. For some it's a sense of accomplishing something meaningful, while others are fueled by a sense of stability and belonging. Coming up with one plan that will positively impact all employees can seem like an impossible task. The following five secrets to motivation will

help you to improve your communication with your staff, align employees with the company's vision and maximize your bottom line.

## **Secret #1: Communicate openly, honestly... and often**

Studies of exit interviews have shown that the number one complaint of employees is lack of communication with management. Simply put, employers who communicate freely and openly with



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their staff about company goals and decisions have a higher rate of retention than those who keep their employees in the dark. By keeping the lines of communication open with your staff, you eliminate the possibility that rumors and misconceptions can creep their way in and create a cancer in the company.

Managers should ideally meet with their staff on a weekly basis in an organized, yet relaxed atmosphere where the employees can ask questions and get answers to their concerns, share their ideas and voice their opinions.

Focus on communicating company goals in a clear and concise manner. Let the staff know how their jobs impact the company's overall mission and you will, at the same time, be providing the employee with a sense of individual purpose, sense of stability and a feeling of trust.

## **Secret # 2: Set clear expectations**

Most employees work well when clear expectations are set for them from the get-go. Take the guesswork out of things and meet regularly with your people to discuss job duties and to set realistic goals. Give them something to work toward and make sure they have the tools to get the job done right. Ask for feedback from them as they work toward their goals, and remember to be positive and offer only constructive criticism if they encounter roadblocks along the way.

Monitor the amount of responsibility given to each person and be careful not to unnecessarily overload anyone. There is a balance between not enough work and too much work where employees thrive without feeling overwhelmed. Seek to achieve that balance with the help and input of your people.

### **Secret #3: Fuel their passion**

In the years since 9/11, the trend in the workplace is to find some higher meaning to what people do. Not everyone can be a firefighter or find the cure for cancer, but you can help your employees uncover their drive. Get people involved; let them volunteer for projects or head committees. If possible, offer continuing education and training in areas that will help take your staff to the next level. By helping people improve themselves, you will be giving them an internal sense of self-worth and purpose. This will trigger an untapped source of motivation and will help your staff develop into a group of confident, top producers.

When challenges arise, set up smaller focus groups to work on developing solutions. Encourage people to share their ideas, challenge each other and brainstorm. Nothing's better for motivating a tapped out staff than a good dose of stimulation.

### **Secret #4: Reward and Recognize**

As I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, different things motivate different people. History has shown that financial benefit is sometimes overrated. Don't overlook the benefits of some good old-fashioned recognition and genuine appreciation. Psychologists have been studying motivation since what seems like the beginning of time. One notable psychologist, B.F. Skinner, discovered that many behaviors could be controlled or motivated by the use of rewards. Skinner conducted his experiments primarily on rats and used pellets as rewards (if only the business world was as simple!). However, his ideas can be applied to the workforce if you take the time to uncover what that magic pellet means for each person. For some it may be public recogni-

tion for a job well done or the flexibility to leave work a few hours early after finishing a big project. It does not have to mean a big dent in your budget, but it must be meaningful to your employees. Solicit their ideas, ask for their input, and then decide on a compromise as to what's beneficial for them and for the company.

### **Secret #5: Break down the barriers**

Be careful not to stifle creative license and independence with too many rules, policies and micromanagement. Often times, there is an invisible barrier between employees and management that creates a lack of trust. Help to break down those barriers by giving your staff the right to certain freedoms. There is a time and place for rules, but, in general, companies should operate on the premise that its employees are trustworthy individuals. Give your people the room they need to grow and develop into self-sufficient, productive employees and you will find that their levels of motivation are through the roof.

Motivation takes many forms. As you begin to uncover what works best for your team, you will realize that it takes more than money to motivate people. It takes clear, consistent communication of goals and expectations, an environment built on mutual respect and trust, and most of all, by good coaching. ■

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#### **About the Author**

Patrick B. Ropella is president and CEO of Ropella & Associates. With 20 years of experience, Ropella & Associates is an international executive search consultancy specializing in the chemical and allied industries.

Ropella & Associates focuses on mid-level management to executive level retained search in sales, marketing, manufacturing and R&D. For more information on its services, visit [www.ropella.com](http://www.ropella.com) or call Patrick Ropella at (850) 983-4777.