

Motivating Employees in Trying Times **By Victor Gray**

Anxiety and uneasiness have increased dramatically since September 11, 2001. In order to be prepared for future acts of terrorism, organizational development professionals can encourage their organizations to address what employees really think and feel. These methods, although tried and true are effective because they get to the heart of what employees really want and need. Use of effective motivation techniques can benefit the present situation, give organizations an advantage on the competition, and assist in recruitment and retention. Here are some methods to maintain and increase effectiveness.

1. **Encourage and support employees' needs for flexibility.** Actions during these times speak louder than words. By offering flextime, companies show they understand "where employees are coming from". These short-term investments can benefit the immediate bottom line and profitability over the long run.
2. **Help employees feel wanted and needed.** A little praise goes a long way. It is important to show they are valued as people, not just as employees. "Bob, when you stayed late to help that major account with the rush order, the impact on our organization was..." Don't forget to send thank-you notes and buy pizza once and a while.
3. **Lead by walking around.** Showing up often to ask, "How's it going?" or to notice something the employee is doing right, rather than wrong, helps enhance morale and productivity.
4. **Show that you are concerned about workplace safety and security.** CEO's may consider saying the following: "Although it may be unlikely that bio-terrorism will directly affect our organization, I want to assure everyone that in the unlikely event something would happen, medication will be provided at no cost." These actions show you care, and you know what thoughts might be in their hearts.
5. **Offer help to manage the extraordinary stress that exists today.** If your organization does not offer counseling through an employee assistance program (EAP), tell your employees that if anyone needs psychological counseling, it will be provided at no cost to them for a specified length of time. "People are concerned about their own jobs and about what's going to happen to their companies," according to author Sigmund Ginsburg. "And on top of the unusual level of anxiety, there's a low level of depression, at least for people in New York and Washington."
6. **Promise job stability, or at least fair treatment in layoffs.** If possible, tell employees their jobs are secure. If not, vow to treat employees fairly in the event downsizing is the only option - to give them as much notice as possible, for example.

7. **Consider what promotions could be made later in 2002.** “If I were a CEO who understood the importance of psychic income,” Ginsburg says, I’d say to top staff, “If we want to hold on to and motivate people, what can we do to make a vice president a president and assembly line worker a foreman?”
8. **Be Open to employees questioning their roles.** People who can’t look at the calendar for next week or next month and anticipate interesting, challenging and enjoyable work are in a job that is ill-defined or just plain wrong. People who feel they’re in this situation need to talk it over with their managers and they’ll often feel apprehensive about asking for such a meeting.” It’s sort of like marriage counseling,” Ginsburg says, “while it’s not easy, it’s often necessary to keep the relationship going.
9. **Weigh psychic income in hiring decisions.** It may seem obvious, but managers making hiring decisions would do well to figure out what, besides financial compensation, excites a candidate about the proposed work-and to check to make sure the enticing psychic income can be delivered.

Inspired by a November 21, 2001, article on *DiversityInc.com* that featured thoughts from Michael Zuckerman, University of Pennsylvania, Sigmund Ginsburg, author and Alan Wolfe, sociologist.

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