

Tired to Inspired: Taking stock of what motivates the workforce

Demanding more from employees may seem easy when the company's future and their jobs are on the line. But inevitably another vexing question arises for hiring managers and executives: How can companies keep employees inspired in an environment of economic uncertainty, added stress and fewer raises?

Responsibility Motivates:

During the country's last recession in the early 2000s, two studies explored what people value in the workplace. One, of 500 workers surveyed by Right Management Consultants, found that 83 percent responded they were "motivated by challenges at work." Another study by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center found the chance to do important work that provides a feeling of accomplishment was the most significant factor in job satisfaction, with salary ranking only third. Giving employees responsibility and a sense of investment in their efforts can have a profound effect on how hard they work.

Invested Interest:

Today more than ever, managers need to be more engaged with their employees and key executives. That often means finding ways aside from compensation to invest in people and thank them for their loyalty. If you don't reward employees for the additional skills and responsibilities they've acquired during the challenging last few years, someone else from another company will as soon as the economy turns around.

Walk over to an employee's desk and talk face-to-face about a question or a project update once in awhile, rather than doing everything by e-mail. Take time to ask people about their goals and ways they think your business can operate better. Take individual staff members to lunch on your dime. Small investments in time and chicken salad can pay dividends, as employees will care more about an assignment if they sense that you care about them.

Knowledge is Power:

Managers can help relieve overworked employees by encouraging collaboration among those whose skills complement each other. A hiring freeze can even become an opportunity, if it motivates a team to find efficiencies through working together. A smaller staff also provides managers an opportunity to learn more about employees'

personalities and the unique ways they each communicate, work and solve problems. People perform best when their assignments match their skills.

Leadership Inspires:

If micromanagement is a curse, then careful delegation is a blessing. Employees with particular aptitudes and ambitions should be given responsibilities accordingly. Allowing some leeway on decision making and demonstrating that you're willing to take a risk on employees' ideas empowers them. Few things inspire more than a sense of ownership in a given project and a true stake in its outcome.

The challenges of the recession have made all of us stronger, smarter and more productive. Survival in recent years has required us to become even more committed to our businesses, and in the long run that experience will help us excel. A new economy calls for new leaders, and those who inspire their organizations now will reap success in the future.

At Christopher Frederick, we help firms in the real estate sector find the executives who know how to motivate in a challenging business climate. To learn more about how we can apply our 20-plus years of experience to your next executive search, contact Chris Hingle at 800-EXU-FIRM, chingle@cfrederick.com.