The 10 commandments of workplace motivation

By Roxanne Emmerich, CSP, CMC

When it comes to workplace motivation, when the rules are followed, morale improves. When we break the rules, motivation deteriorates. Managers spend too much time in denial by insisting that they are building a motivating workplace, when, in fact, they are often sabotaging it. A motivating work environment is the responsibility of everyone. Gone are the days when we look to managers to motivate.

Here are 10 commandments to follow if you want to build a motivated workplace.

1. **Build self-respect.** Positive reinforcement allows people to understand that their performance adds value to the organization. Receiving positive strokes gives employees a sense of satisfaction that creates the initiative to try new ideas and take bigger risks. No matter how confident we are, we all have moments of insecurity where our performance drops. We all need strokes.

2. **Don't be neurotic** (or disguise it well). Employees deserve to have a clear understanding of what behaviors and outcomes are expected. Many managers are so unclear that they create the perception that they are intentionally hiding the target. Provide a precise vision.

3. **Show respect.** Managers often treat employees like a child in an adult-child relationship. An adult-adult transaction requires that managers allow employees the latitude to solve problems. Provide guidance with a clear picture of what outcomes are expected and allow people to think.

4. **Live integrity.** It is unquestionably true that most people would say they keep their word. In any day, however, those same people will break their word repeatedly in small ways. Employees spot all the ways that managers miss obligations by small things like not sending out reports that were promised, delaying meetings, etc.

Employees are quick to spot slips in integrity in peers and managers. Instead of confronting the problem directly, they too often fall out of integrity by blaming, gossiping, and whining. Living in integrity means keeping our word and speaking a deeper truth.

5. **Be fair.** In a world where there isn't much that is fair, we need to find ways to be as fair as possible. Fair doesn't mean equal. Paying for performance isn't fair if you cap the incentives that a star performer can receive. If you reward employees—for cost savings, an increase in revenue or sales, the additional money is always there to share. Share it!
6. **Value and reinforce ideas.** According to an Employee Involvement Association study, the average employee in Japan submits 32 ideas for improvement per year, compared to the average employee in the United States who submits 0.17. The root of this problem stems from the fact that only 33 percent of U.S. employees' ideas are adopted—compared to 87 percent from Japanese workers.

If we expect people to give us their ideas for improving the organization, we need to have a serious system for evaluating and implementing all ideas. People who submit ideas that help your organization are entitled to a quick decision and reason about the idea they had.

7. **Give them what they want.** Each of your employees has a different idea of how they prefer to be rewarded. Money, trips, educational opportunities, promotions, verbal recognition—everyone likes it differently. If you don't know what they want, ask them.

8. **Give immediate feedback.** Whoever created the yearly performance review anyway? By itself there is really nothing wrong with it; but somewhere along the path, we assumed that all feedback gets stuck in a file and delivered yearly. The problem with this approach is that inappropriate behavior becomes habit by the time the employee hears about it. Worse yet, you lose the benefit of re-energizing your people with the substantial immediate impact of positive reinforcement for a project well-done.

9. **Reinforce the right things.** One of the companies I have done work for believed that good employees come to work early and stay late. Not surprisingly, the CEO came to work early and stayed late. When a new CEO came, he placed the emphasis on performance and productivity went up miraculously. Those same employees did more work in less time. Watch what you reinforce because you will undoubtedly get more of it.

10. **Serve others.** Switch the focus from client satisfaction to client success. Every thriving organization is passionate about serving their clients. When we focus on our clients' success, we enroll our hearts, minds and souls as opposed to simply working from our job descriptions.

So, it's easy. If you want to improve the motivation of your workplace, follow these 10 commandments.

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