

Staff Matters Creating Good Employee Morale on a Shoe-String Budget

Creating good morale at work starts right from the moment your new employee walks through your doors. How they are greeted, treated and where they are seated, all play a part in how long you will keep them with you! The first few days of a new job are always the most confusing, no matter what position you are in. Training, learning and meeting new people will cause a new employee's head to spin with information overload.

You can lessen the burden on a new employee in their first few weeks by creating an environment that is friendly, helpful and organized. Orientation is an essential part of creating good morale at work, and costs very little for what your return on investment will be.

With five employees on board, Angie Quaale of Well Seasoned in Langley, BC knows how important it is to make the process of integrating new employees a fun but organized one. "Although we have a structured training program for working here, we try to keep the orientation flexible depending on the employees experience and product knowledge," says Quaale. "Unlike many other businesses, our training incorporates food and wine tasting, so it's always a fun experience!"

Orientation doesn't have to be a complicated process and you can choose an existing employee to act as a sponsor or "buddy" so that you ensure your new employee is not left on his or her own. But be sure to spend some time with them when they first arrive, to answer any questions they may have, and to start building that valuable relationship with them. When people know that the owner or manager of their company cares enough to spend time getting to know them, they are more likely to get a good first impression of your business.

It is very important to take time in advance to prepare for new employees. A "New Employee Checklist" is a valuable document that all organizations should have so that no important steps are missed. Have a few files prepared with a welcome letter, blank Provincial and Federal Tax forms, a personal information form (for emergency contacts), and any health and dental benefit documents that may be required. Have a designated person (in HR or Administration) schedule time with the new employee on their first day to go through the new hire package. This may also be something you do yourself, depending on the size of your business.

A New Employee Checklist may include things like a tour of the premises, set up of work station with computer equipment and telephone, and introductions to the people that the new employee will be working with. You may also want to include a team lunch within the first week of orientation. It's a good idea to also include copies of important policies for them to read, such as hours of operation, dress code, safety and vacation entitlements. Including a copy of the statutory holiday schedule for the year is helpful too, so that the person can plan their yearly vacation entitlement. Whatever is important knowledge for your new employee and their introduction to your company is valuable to have in the orientation package.

All that talk about being an employer of choice can be disheartening for a small business owner. How can you possibly compete with larger organizations who can offer more extensive health benefits, perhaps better wages and expensive perquisites? It's easy really, and if you get to know your employees' individual motivators, you can custom tailor rewards that are suitable for them.

Cassandra Tompkins, owner of The Woman's Place Fitness Group in Kelowna works to help her employees reach their goals; as a result she has retained the same staff for nearly two years. "Every year I hold performance reviews that include goal setting. If an employee wants to become a certified personal trainer or improve their administration skills I will help them with the costs in meeting those goals. Even if an employee wants to take a certain fitness class during work hours, I'll cover for her while she tries it out," says Tompkins.

Creating a "fun survey" and having an employee fill it out when they first arrive gives you great insight into what their likes and dislikes are, how best they like to be recognized for a job well done and what their goals and dreams are.

Your Employee Fun Survey can include such questions as:

- favourite treat or dessert
- do they have a pet
- do they have children
- what are some of their hobbies outside of work
- do they prefer a quiet "thank you" or a public show of recognition in front of their peers
- where do they see themselves in the next 2 to five years
- what do they consider work/life balance to be
- what reward under \$25 would motivate them
 - o gift certificates
 - o movie certificates
 - o restaurant certificates
 - o babysitting or cleaning services
- would they be interested in a paid half day or full day off to volunteer for their favourite charity

There are many ways to motivate employees without spending a ton of money. You could have a "Be a Manager for a Day" reward or prime parking spot for the month. Use your imagination and most importantly, ask your people what they want. If you don't ask, you may be missing a great opportunity to reward someone in a way that is meaningful to them personally.

Diana Alexander of Elite Beauty Group Inc. says that her spa and salon perks easily add up to a \$200-\$600 in savings each month for the employees. They receive free to low priced services and products at her cost. What better way to motivate employees in the health and beauty industry? She gets a lot of resumes dropped off to her each week, from candidates who are aware of those additional perks.

There is one key reason to put a personal touch on how you treat, reward and acknowledge your employees, and that is retention. Not only are they hard to get these days, but they are very hard to keep as well, with so many competitive businesses vying for good employees, who are the lifeblood of any successful organization. By showing your employees that you care and are interested in their lives, desires and aspirations, you will succeed in creating an environment of trust, respect and loyalty. Watch your employee morale soar and become an employer of choice in your industry.

Women's Enterprise Centre is the go-to place for BC women business owners for business loans, skills training, business advisory services, resources, publications and referrals. Call us at 1.800.643.7014 or email info@womensenterprise.ca from anywhere in BC.