



## SUSTAINING MOTIVATION, COMMITMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY IN TOUGH TIMES

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We hear from the economists that New Zealand is coming out of the recession. For those of us with jobs we are thankful we still have them. However there are some employees out there who are not satisfied with their job and want to move on, but can't, as there aren't the opportunities available to them.

So how does this impact on your business? You don't want someone sitting there, going through the motions and doing the bare minimum – but you may not know how to manage it.

In times of boom it is easy to motivate employees. Good cash flow and growth can be translated into pay increases, bonuses, recognition and promotion for employees. Conversely, when the cash isn't flowing, there is the threat of job cuts, pay freezes and reduction in working hours.

Here are some simple steps you can put in place to engage employees and reduce the risk of dissatisfaction.

1) **Communicate your Vision**

Do your employees know what you are trying to achieve? Disengagement can manifest itself when an employee feels they have no purpose and are unsure what the business is trying to achieve and their role in that. By communicating your vision, talking to employees about where you want to be in the short, medium and long term and discussing with them their role in your vision you will engage them. They will feel a sense of ownership if they understand where they fit into the big picture.

2) **Value Contribution**

Ask your employees their opinion on the business, where they see the business is heading and what is going well and what isn't. Take on board some of the comments, no matter how small, and be seen to act on them. When employees see that their contribution has been recognised they will feel a sense of ownership and belonging. Feeling valued as an individual has a consistently rated higher in surveys as a successful motivator than money alone.

3) **Involve Employees**

When you are thinking about making changes, or just want to do things better, faster or smarter talk to your employees about your ideas. They are the people generally working at the coal face and will be able to provide you with valuable feedback. I recently worked with a Company who was looking at reducing their workforce. After discussing the situation with employees they all agreed to reduce their

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salary by 5%, which gave the business owner enough cash flow to get them through a difficult period. The employees felt that by being involved in the discussion they had some degree of control over the situation.

4) Manage Performance

Whether it is good or bad, performance needs to be managed. Good performance is relatively easy to manage by providing further opportunities, training or financial reward. Poor performance can be more difficult. If you have a poor performer, it is vital that you manage the performance as soon as you notice it is not up to scratch. Start with informal meetings to address the issues and work out a plan with the employee as to how you are going to manage performance. Make sure performance targets are measurable, realistic and timely. And don't be afraid to act if the measures you put in place don't work. Employees notice what is going on around them – if you ignore the poor performer then the message you are sending is not the right one.

5) Be Honest

Give your employees an honest answer when they ask you a question about the business and how it is performing. By giving your employees an honest answer you will gain their respect and alleviate anxiety. Anxious employees will worry, but by being honest they will be able to balance perception with reality.

6) Keep Communication Lines Open

During recessions employees tend to be more aware of rumours and gossip within companies, enhanced by the doom and gloom portrayed in the media. You can ease suspense and quash rumours by providing employees with factual and timely information. Make sure you are having staff meetings keeping everyone abreast of what is happening in your Company. Keeping the lines of communication open will give them a sense of stability.

7) Build Commitment

Remember to provide your employees with opportunities to advance, to learn new skills and to take on new challenges. These opportunities build commitment and positive retention. The recession provides an opportunity to work smarter and this is the perfect opportunity to create stretch goals enabling people to grow while providing a morale booster and commitment to the company.

8) Put the Right People in the Right Places

Your Company may be operating with less people so you need to ensure that you have the right people in the right places. You are probably expecting people to do more with less however if you give everyone appropriate and relevant training and communicate your expectations and provide regular and meaningful feedback you will automatically be motivating employees by acknowledging and supporting their particular skills.

9) Seek External Expert Advice

If it all gets 'too hard' don't be afraid to seek external advice. There are experts out there in the accounting, human resource, marketing and technology markets who will be able to provide you and your employees with the expertise you require. If you bring in the experts, you will gain their respect and provide them with an additional resource to learn from.

10) Say 'Thank You'

The one thing we hear constantly is 'I didn't even get a thank you!' Don't underestimate those two words. Most employees just want to be noticed, so if they contribute, participate or go the extra mile make sure you recognise it. Whether it is a short note, a word of thanks at a team meeting or a long lunch break there are simple ways to recognise and reward people who are adding value to your business.

These steps in motivating employees are not necessarily just for getting through the tough times! By implementing the points on a day to day basis you will find your employees know the direction of the business, their role in the business and that they are recognised, rewarded and managed. A simple equation that equals motivated and productive employees!