



Appreciate Employees: Keys to a Happier, More Productive Staff

William is an aspiring attorney and has been working as a legal assistant in a prestigious law firm for 18 months. He loves the idea of fulfilling his dream and works long hours, without being asked. William is well-paid and enjoys every bit of his job; however, there is just one significant element of dissatisfaction. He has no knowledge of his value to the firm; he doesn't feel appreciated. Should this be a concern for management?

Yes! Management should be concerned because it greatly impacts an employee's view of you, the job, and the company as a whole. Research has consistently shown that people will *not* give their best for money alone, but they will work harder and with more passion, for recognition and a bit of appreciation.

It's important to show your employees how much you value them and their contributions – no matter how large or small – to the business. No special occasion is necessary. In fact, small surprises, and tokens of your appreciation spread throughout the year will help your employees feel valued.

While there are hundreds of ideas out there, here are a few that you can implement in your office today:

Praise employees for a job well done. Identify the specific actions that you found admirable even if they are daily routine duties. It's easy to lose the thrill and challenge within certain job descriptions if they are performed on regular bases and are considered

menial. Simple statements such as “please” “you are doing a fine job” or just asking if there is anything you can do to improve the quality and satisfaction of the job, can go a long way.

Take Sarah, for example. She had worked on the housekeeping staff at a local hotel for more than five years. She was primarily responsible for cleaning and stocking the public areas, including the rest rooms. She was always on time, never missed a day of work, and never received any complaints. She never received any compliments either. During her fifth year, the hotel came under new management. Shortly thereafter, she noticed that the new hotel manager would always nod and smile when he saw her. One day, he stopped and asked her name. Surprised, Sarah responded. Then, he said, “Sarah, these restrooms are always clean and stocked with everything our guests need. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate how you help us to maintain high standards of service and excellence. If there is anything I can do to make your job easier, please let me know.” Sarah was stunned. You see in all her years on the cleaning staff, she had never received any kind of compliment regarding her work.

When you praise employees for a job well done, they know that you have noticed their hard work and find their responsibilities to be just as significant as those higher on the corporate ladder.

No matter how large or small the job, remember to praise and show appreciation. It is a rare individual who does not want to be appreciated.

Recognize and respect diversity. A great way to recognize and respect diversity is by acknowledging the various holidays that are celebrated by your staff. Whether it’s Christmas, Hanukah, St. Patrick’s Day or Yom Kippur day, create a bulletin board that allows staff to express their individuality and cultural backgrounds. When you recognize and respect the diversity of your staff, they will respect you a lot more as their leader.

Show interest in your staff. Ask your staff about their family, hobbies, weekend or a special event. Your approach to this question may vary depending on the individual employee. Although it is rare, some employees may find it offensive to inquire about their lives outside of work. Asking questions about personal business may be perceived as an invasion of privacy. Make sure your employees know that your intent is to acknowledge their need for happiness and balance – outside of the workplace. An effective way to convey this is to have a friends and family day. Plan an event for the entire workforce in which they can invite family and friends to share in a day of fun, food, and relaxation. Showing genuine interest in employees' family, hobbies, weekend or special events send the message that you care about them.

Offer staff members flexible scheduling for the holidays, if possible. If work coverage is critical, post a calendar so that people can balance their time off with that of other employees. Opportunities for time/day exchanges may be set up between employees; allowing them to fill in for one another. Allowing flexible scheduling sends the message that employees are valued.

Know your staff's interest well enough to present a small token occasionally. An appreciated gift, and the gesture of providing it, will brighten up your employees' day. For example, Sharon works as the administrative assistant in a small training firm. As a hobby, she collects books of matches from restaurants. Each time the company's president dines at a four- or five-star restaurant, he brings her a pack of matches. Since he conducts seminars nationally as well as internationally, Sharon now has matches from all over the United States and several foreign countries. A small token, but highly appreciated.

Say “thank you.” These are two of the most powerful words in the English language. You can't touch it or see it, but it goes straight to the heart. Saying “thank you” builds staff loyalty; it increases productivity, which leads to greater customer satisfaction; and it opens the door for employees to give you more of what you want. When you neglect to thank your staff, you neglect to nurture the stability of your business.

Everyone, whether they want to admit it or not, likes to feel appreciated. An appreciated staff is a motivated staff, and this leads to a more productive staff. When you show your employees that their hard work and dedication is appreciated, this will motivate them to continue the good work for your business. Using the tips outlined above, tell your staff that you appreciate them, not matter how minute you may think the task may be. Every positive comment helps boost an employee's self esteem. When you continue to do this on a regular basis, don't be surprised if your staff starts thanking you and showing *you* more appreciation.

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