

## Answers from the Board

# Appreciation Goes A Long Way Towards Motivation



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Dear Board,

I own a ten-person, professional security firm. I have six long-time employees and four newer employees. I want to keep them all motivated, I have two questions. Do I have to do the same thing for everyone, new and old, and other than big cash bonuses what can I do to motivate them?

Signed,

Wanting happy people

Dear Wanting,

Let's start with what motivation is. According to Essential Managers Manual by Heller and Hindle, "motivation is the will to act." That being the case, your employee's base motivation is the security of their job, the base of the whole Needs Hierarchy from Psychology 101. That base motivation may get them to work every day, but is unlikely to make them the never-ending source of customer pleasing, ever increasing profit driving superstars that you want.

The good news is that big money bonuses do not correlate with job satisfaction, much less motivation. In fact, five out of five articles I researched with titles like "The Top Ten Reasons People Leave a Job" list money issues at number four or below. This phenomenon is not limited to the United States; one of the aforementioned articles came from an Irish business newspaper.

Money is not the answer - so what is? For the answer, we go back to our articles. The top three reasons listed, without fail, come down to a common issue. A failure to feel important, appreciated, respected, or in some extreme cases, acknowledged. That would be at the top of the Psychology 101 hierarchy. People need to feel as if what they do has worth; men in particular derive the majority of their self-worth from their work lives. Do we give everyone a vice president's title and a key to the newly designated executive washroom? I think not. Let's take one idea at a time. To make an employee feel important you must first value their contribution and let them know that. Weekly meetings are a great time to pass out earned recognition awards; people love to hear their names, particularly when the words 'good job' precede it. I applaud any company that has a recognition program such as Employee of the Month, etc. The danger is that static programs of that nature turn into popularity contests or are decided based on who has not been selected yet. The parking place and \$100 prize are quickly used and forgotten in the rush and grind of daily work and the sameness of the award.

As a small company you have the opportunity to know your employees and have an understanding of what they like on and off the clock. Imagine the impact a subscription to Canoe Monthly would have on the office outdoors fanatic that comes in from the weekend telling everyone about the latest trip down the river. Likewise the tickets to Sunday's football game given to the office manager that has a Texans' flag at her desk.

To motivate your people, make sure when you are handing out praise to do so as often as warranted, or reward them in such a way that shows your employees that you have actually taken the time to know them as well as their work.



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