

Staff Motivation: Core Truths about Raising Employee Engagement in the Workplace

By Paul Falcone {www.PaulFalconeHR.com}

There are many books and articles available on how to motivate staff without money, how to reinvigorate weary teams in light of the ongoing changes and challenges in our competitive workplace, and how to encourage others with awe-inspiring leadership strategies and tactics. And while some of the content contained in these articles may very well work for you from time to time, the core truth is that many of these miss the most important point: motivation comes from beingness, not from doingness.

When team energy seems to lag, senior leaders often think—very reactively—what do we need to be doing differently? Or what books can we buy now that focus on ways of motivating staff? Worse, these topics often only come up in one of two key scenarios: when key performers are being lured away by headhunters or when there's talk of union organizing efforts. Under those two dire conditions, leaders typically flock to the tomes available on the bookstore shelf that propose bold new ideas on how to motivate and reengage staffers who might otherwise not be “feeling the love...” But what if the truth were that you—as the department leader or immediate supervisor—aren't responsible for motivating your team? What if the answer lies in the fact that motivation is internal and people can only motivate themselves? If you accept those assumptions, then you'll quickly realize that your responsibility as a leader is not to motivate others, per se, but to create an environment where people can motivate themselves. And if you can come to terms with that truism, then it's simply a matter of understanding how to do that....



PEOPLE RESPECT COMPETENCY, PASSION, AND GENUINE CONCERN FOR OTHERS IN THE LEADERS THEY CHOOSE TO FOLLOW

Think of your favorite boss. How would you describe that person? Think especially about how you'd describe why that individual was your favorite boss. If you're like most people, our answers would probably sound like this:

“Kim always made me feel special. She made me feel like I made a difference, that my opinions mattered, and that she was on my side. She had my back and I had hers, and we always had fun—no matter what craziness we were facing in terms of the daily challenges that came our way. Further, she was very respectful of others, she listened attentively, and she practiced servant leadership—she put others' needs ahead of her own and expected people to respond in kind. She had very high expectations, she taught to those standards and always helped us focus on developing our skills and building our resume. Boy, do I miss working for her...”

A SIMPLER SOLUTION

So rather than worrying yourself silly about 101 ways to motivate your team or something similar to that, relax. Take a deep breath and go inside to find your truth. Ask yourself a few magical questions:

- Am I the type of boss to my team members that Kim was to me?
- How would people describe me in terms of the leadership I provide—the structure, direction, and feedback that I offer on a day-to-day basis?
- Do my employees feel like I know them and care for them? Do they sense honesty and transparency in my dealing with them, and would they describe me as a selfless leader who considers their needs in our day-to-day dealings?
- Would I want to work for me?

If the answers to any of these questions is no, then you might want to rethink your approach to your role as a people leader.

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From the Editors

We would like to thank Paul Falcone for contributing this timely article that addresses the importance of engaging and motivating staff in the workplace. We hope you find this edition of the HR newsletter valuable to your organization, and we encourage you to let us know what you and your organization would like us to address in future updates.

Maureen & Sonya ■

Double, Double Toil and Trouble

Pending FLSA Salary Increases

Who wouldn't like their salary to increase by 10 percent, 20 percent or even a jaw dropping 50 percent?

As many of you are aware, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is preparing to make substantial changes to the salary level test for determining exempt/nonexempt status, thereby making many current exempt workers no longer exempt and therefore eligible for overtime pay.

Under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) there are exemptions from minimum wage and overtime pay for executive, administrative, professional, and computer employees. The current federal rate (California & New York are higher) is a weekly salary of \$455 (or \$23,660 annually). The new rate is proposed at \$970 per week (or \$50,440 annually). This more than doubles the current level.

WHAT'S A NONPROFIT TO DO?

First, take a look at your current exempt qualifying positions. Review the job descriptions and actual duties those positions perform and determine how far off from the new salary they are. Think, how



important are those positions? Can you condense positions and transfer duties to another exempt position?

DO THE MATH.

For example, maybe it will cost less in the long run to increase several staff's salaries to meet the new level. Thereby avoiding five to ten hours of overtime per position each week.

INCREASE YOUR HEADCOUNT.

If you have reduced exempt positions, you may need to hire additional full or part time hourly/nonexempt staff to insure that the nonexempt duties are

taken care of without the need for overtime pay.

BE WELL VERSED IN THE FLSA RECORD-KEEPING LAWS.

Those former exempt employees who didn't track their time are now tracking each and every minute worked, as the law requires. You need to pay appropriately.

THINK ABOUT COMMUNICATION.

How are you going to get the word out? Be aware that your employees may already be discussing these upcoming changes and anticipating large increases. If your organization decides to pay for hours worked and decrease the number of exempt positions, realize that many of your current exempt employees may view the change as a demotion. Consider having both private and group discussions to control morale. Education for all on the law may be your friend. Be as open and transparent as possible.

No matter what course you choose, there will be issues. Be ready to weather the rough spots with humor, communication and facts. ■

Once Again Why Documentation Is Important: Tardy Teacher Wins

A New Jersey elementary school teacher has been allowed to keep his job even though he was late to work 111 times in two years.



An arbitrator said the employee, who makes \$90,000 a year, wasn't given adequate notice from his bosses that he needed to correct his behavior. ■

We Are Here For You

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Staff Motivation

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Look—we all feel overwhelmed and underappreciated at times, and that’s sure to show itself in our day-to-day dealings with others. That’s okay because we’re human and sometimes we get short with one another. But what if you changed your sponsoring thought about yourself in relationship to the people you supervise? What if you consider the greatest gift in the workplace the fact that you have an opportunity to mold and develop future leaders to one day replace you (as you move up your own career ladder)? What if you looked to reinvent relationships with those who don’t appear to be happy with their own performance or who generate negativity and dissatisfaction? And, what if you realized that the greatest gift you could give your subordinates lies in helping them realize how looking at the workplace from a standpoint of thankfulness and gratitude will make their whole work experience change forever?

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE IN REALITY?

Simply put, if you care, they’ll care. If you put others’ needs ahead of your own, people will typically respond in kind. And when they don’t and they try to take advantage of your kindness, peer pressure will typically kick in and fix the problem for you on its own: “Hey, don’t talk that way about Paul. He’s too good a guy and he works too hard for anyone to treat him with anything other than respect. He’s passionate about what he does and he cares about us individually—not just in terms of the work we produce. So knock it off—you won’t find many people on your side if you make a comment like that again.”

Further, how do you, as a true leader, address someone who appears to be disengaged, dissatisfied, or otherwise burned out or angry at work? Here’s how this leadership wisdom might reveal itself in a case like this:

You: “John, I wanted to meet with you one-on-one and in private to discuss something that I perceive but that you may not be aware of. Over the past two or three months, I’ve noticed that you’re becoming shorter with everyone. You appear to be angry and frustrated, disappointed in the company, and at times outright confrontational and loud about your experience working here. Can you see why I might perceive things that way or why others might be keeping a distance from you nowadays, or does this sound totally foreign to you?”

Employee: “Yeah, I guess I can come across that way at times, but this company is so cheap. They keep taking things away and demanding more of us. They’re sitting on record amounts of cash but won’t add to headcount, our systems are totally out-of-date, we’re always announcing things at the last minute so that everything’s always urgent, and it’s just no fun around here anymore.”

You: “Okay, I’ll give you that...Much of what you’re describing I’m seeing too, and there isn’t much we can do about that. Does my behavior reflect yours? In other words, we’re seeing and experiencing the same things, but would you—or do others—describe me as someone who’s potentially angry, frustrated, and confrontational?”

Employee: “No, they don’t. It obviously doesn’t bother you as much as it bothers me.”

You: “Not necessarily—you may be interpreting too much into your response there and making some assumptions that may not accurately reflect reality. Let me share with you how I think I could help. Do I have your permission to share some constructive advice, and will you be open to what I have to say and think about it?”

Employee: “Sure.”

You: “You may have allowed yourself to get swept up in the negativity, to feed into the downside that exists in every office in every company and every industry, without realizing how much you can lead the change and be part of the solution. Sure it can be frustrating—how you define yourself in light of this challenge indicates how much you’re willing to learn and grow from it.”

“When I originally hired you, I saw someone with amazing talent. I saw someone who was passionate about what you do, someone who came aboard looking to make a difference, and someone interested in giving back to the company while building your own skills and experience. *That’s the person I want back now...I want you to think about how to reinvent your relationship to this company and to your fellow team members. I want you to think about how you can come from thankfulness and appreciation rather than resentment and frustration. Most important, I want you to*

come over to my side and partner with me to make this a better experience for everyone. You carry a lot of clout and influence with your coworkers, and if they sense we’re partnering together and on the same side, it will restore harmony to the entire team. Can you make that commitment to me?”

And voila—no drama, no judgment, and no unnecessary confrontation. You’ve simply reminded your subordinate about his own talents, his unique ability to influence others, and his opportunity to reinvent himself and strengthen his reputation. In short, you’ll have demonstrated how your beingness—in this case, your patience, wisdom, and selflessness in helping your staffer reflect on how his negativity is coming across to you and others—allows other to motivate themselves by seeing the bigger picture and the view from your vantage point. The details don’t matter—there will always be workplace shortcomings and irritants due to overwhelming volume, inferior systems and processes, or personality conflicts. However, your workplace wisdom allowed this individual to rise above the action, see the broader picture, and re-define himself in light of these challenges.

Such leadership and workplace wisdom is your gift to share, your ability to positively impact others’ lives and careers, and your opportunity to give back to others in a spirit of openness and goodwill. Motivational leadership doesn’t get any better than that. Just remember that it’s who you are that counts—not necessarily what you do at any given point in time. You’ll soon realize that when you come from a spirit of selflessness, an understanding that growing and developing people is the greatest gift the workplace offers, and that teaching appreciation and thankfulness changes everything about your daily experience, you’ll create more harmony at work, get more done through your people, and develop a very loyal following of self-motivated staffers who will see you as the best boss they’ve ever had. ■

ABOUT PAUL FALCONE

Paul is currently a senior-level human resources executive with a large company in San Diego. He is the author of books and articles which address the tough and practical issues that inevitably surface in the workplace, and Paul also gives back 10% of the proceeds from his web store to Starlight Children’s Foundation.

Can You Terminate After Receiving A Two Weeks Notice?

Recently we have received inquiries from participating organizations about terminating an employee who has just tendered their resignation.

QUESTION: An employee just provided us with a two weeks notice of resignation. Can we decline the notice and inform the employee that today will be the last day of employment?

ANSWER: Although there is no requirement to accept a two weeks notice, providing there is no existing employment contract to honor such a resignation, there are several reasons why employers should not respond to a two weeks notice by terminating the employee. If an employer declines to accept the two weeks notice, it is in effect terminating the employee. Therefore, the former employee has a right to claim unemployment insurance if his or her future employment plans should change for some reason. Also, such a termination may provide a former employee with a wrongful termination claim if he or she leaves under adverse circumstances. Employers generally expect professionalism from their employees, including the expectation that departing employees will provide two weeks notice prior to resigning the position. In fact, some employee handbooks specifically cite such a notice. If employers terminate employees upon receiving notice of resignation, future departing employees may be reluctant to provide such notice for fear of immediate termination without receiving compensation for the last two weeks of employment.

If you feel strongly that a resigning employee should leave immediately for any reason, we suggest that you tactfully inform the departing employee that he or she will be compensated for the following two weeks and that it is not necessary that he or she remain on the premises after the close of business. ■

A Reminder:

The purpose of this update is to review the latest developments in human resource matters. The information contained herein has been abridged from numerous sources and should not be construed as legal advice or opinion, and is not a substitute for the advice of counsel.