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Effective Employee Engagement

Finding the right ways to motivate employees can increase productivity — and your bottom line.



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In workplaces throughout the United States, employee motivation and engagement are alarmingly low.

According to Gallup's 2017 State of the American Workplace report, a mere 33 percent of U.S. employees revealed that they are engaged. In addition, only 21 percent of employees said they strongly agree that their performance is managed in a fashion that motivates them to do outstanding work.

So if your firm employees are getting their work done, do you really need to focus on their level of motivation and engagement? The answer is a resounding yes. For starters, it's been found that organizations with higher than average levels of engagement among their employees experience 50 percent higher sales, 27 percent higher profits, 50 percent higher customer loyalty levels and 38 percent above-average productivity.

If you want to motivate your employees and boost your firm's bottom line, there are a number of strategies you can implement to start ticking that engagement level up.

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TAKE TIME TO HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Getting employees motivated starts with hiring the right people in the first place. According to Jason Savage, Chief Operating Officer at the Law Office of Kenneth E. Berger, your hiring process needs to be very thorough. This means that you should take a little more time to search for the right person to hire.

"The best candidate will actually enjoy their work and understand how every task they complete creates a better result for their clients," Savage says. "If you hire the best people, they keep themselves motivated by striving for excellence."

OFFER SUFFICIENT BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION

When looking for the best candidates out there, you need to be prepared to offer excellent compensation and benefits, as well as bonuses and raises for outstanding performance. Look at what competitors are offering and analyze what compensation and bonus system works for your firm. Then, find the sweet spot that will attract the best law firm employees in your area.

"When employees recognize how their compensation is directly tied to their performance, they'll remain motivated to be productive and constantly raise the bar of their work," says Savage.

Figure out what you can do to free up time for your law firm employees, whether it's changing their software or assigning another employee to support them.

USE "NINE MINUTES ON MONDAY" TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Too often, employees are focused on doing their day-to-day tasks instead of on the bigger picture. Employees are usually over-managed, under-led and not living up to their full potential, according to James Robbins, a motivation specialist and creator of the Nine Minutes on Monday employee motivation program. Robbins will also be presenting on this

topic at ALA's 2019 Annual Conference & Expo (alanet.org/conf19) this April. Using the key principles from his program, law firm managers can increase motivation and engagement.

"[It's] a simple framework to help managers stay out of the weeds and instead focused on the key activities that drive employee engagement," says Robbins. "It's essentially a map to follow that doesn't take a lot of time and yet yields big results by bringing you back to the things that matter most."

Some key teachings from Nine Minutes on Monday include:

- Learning what the top engagement factors are and then implementing them
- Showing employees how what they do affects the organization
- Developing a formula for giving feedback that takes the stress out of addressing subpar performance
- Discovering how to use recognition codes to recognize and reward employees so they feel valued, inspired and appreciated

The program is about the little things managers can do on a consistent basis that "involve linking purpose to pay, helping employees experience autonomy as well as having meaningful goals with feedback," says Robbins. "Great leadership is largely skill-based and can be improved upon with some intentional practice. Know what great leaders do and then keep doing those things until you get better and better. Your people will love you for it."

GIVE EMPLOYEES DOWNTIME

Billable hours and set schedules encourage employees to work for at least eight hours per day, every workday. However, giving them some space to take a break is going to motivate them. Figure out what you can do to free up time for your law firm employees, whether it's changing their software or assigning another employee to support them.

"We can't ask people to work every minute and expect perfection," says Abby Rooney, Director of Human Resources at

Your firm's employees need to be constantly growing in their careers. Managers should be challenging employees to be better by broadening their skill sets and taking on new tasks and roles.

Foley & Mansfield, PLLP, and the 2018-2019 President of ALA's Minnesota Chapter. "There is a case for downtime, team building and just taking a break. Finding a balance is challenging. We try to find ways to eliminate the pain points our timekeepers have. Do they need a third monitor? Do they know how to use the software effectively? What could a support person take off their plate to allow them to focus on their work?"

CHALLENGE EMPLOYEES TO BE BETTER

Your firm's employees need to be constantly growing in their careers. Managers should be challenging employees to be better by broadening their skill sets and taking on new tasks and roles. "People are most motivated when they are doing work that is challenging to them, over which they feel some level of control and autonomy and that they can see contributes to some bigger picture," says Charles D. Brown, Managing Partner at Brown, Christie & Green.

If you challenge employees, Savage suggests you make sure to arm them with the right skills and knowledge to face challenges head on through frequent internal and external trainings. "Empowered employees are productive employees."

HAVE FUN TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Getting together every once in a while to take a break and have an enjoyable time is crucial for team building and cultivating motivation. Brown says that at his firm, they have a fun day, a happy hour, a party or an extra day off once a quarter. "These things are an inexpensive way to recognize the work and effort my team puts in on a day-to-day basis."

PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE AND POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Giving constructive feedback to employees is a crucial step in the Nine Minutes on Monday program. Positive feedback is important as well, because it drives motivation.

Robbins says that while corporate rewards programs are great, they are "not a replacement for each individual manager to be able to say something nice to their staff. The best way to reward someone is to appreciate their efforts and acknowledge how they make a difference in the organization."



According to Rooney, when you recognize an achievement, you should do it in a way the employee would like to be showcased. For example, you could announce his or her achievement to the entire company or simply email a "kudos" message. "Bonuses and gift cards are appreciated but don't have the lasting effects of positive feedback," he says.

SMALL STEPS

In the frenetic pace of today's firms, finding time to implement some of these steps in jam-packed days can be challenging. But investing in the time upfront to find the right employees — and taking the time along the way to remind employees of their value — can go a long way to making your employees more engaged. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kylie Ora Lobell is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles. She covers legal issues, blogs about content marketing, and reports on Jewish topics. She's been published in *Tablet Magazine*, *NewsCred*, *The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles* and *CMO.com*.



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