

# Motivating your staff

By Dr. Anthony Alessandra  
and Jeffrey P. Davidson, CMC

**K**eeping all employees motivated all the time is a near impossible task. Yet, as supervisor, you are often the driving force through which difficult tasks and activities can be accomplished by your staff. It's not enough to merely be a good scheduler or administrator; you must be a good "people" motivator.

Contemporary thought holds that no one can motivate another; each individual must be motivated from within. Yet we know that individuals will give an extra effort for a cause, for personal advancement or for a leader.

What then, can be done to foster a climate conducive to generating that extra effort?

## Lead By Example

There are numerous ways to help achieve a climate conducive to a motivated staff. It is helpful to indicate your concern about your staff and maintain awareness of the individual problems and concerns of each. Encourage independent thinking, initiative, and resourcefulness. For your more competent staff members work towards reducing the amount of supervision that they receive which indicates your trust and reliance upon their capabilities.

If you are an enthusiastic type of supervisor and demonstrate this enthusiasm in your speech, mannerisms and behavior, this enthusiasm can be contagious to your staff and will help create a spirited atmosphere in which everyone is energized and raring to go. Remember, though, that a certain amount of pressure may be necessary with some to ensure that goals and objectives will be met. Only a small minority of workers are ever challenged to perform near their true capacity.

There are other ways to get the "motivation" ball rolling:

- Offer praise as often as possible and certainly where the employee undertakes a late afternoon, a new, or especially difficult assignment. As Blanchard and Johnson say in the *One Minute Manager*, "Catch somebody doing something right."
- Be receptive to ideas from your staff. Learn from them and be open to all suggestions including those with little chance of working. This openness will enhance more creative thinking and more independent and happier employees.
- Demonstrate your confidence in your staff by what you say and what you do. Convey the belief

that the tasks assigned can effectively be performed.

- Focus on results rather than methods for accomplishing tasks. This fosters creativity and ingenuity and keeps the team's approach to obstacles fresh and vibrant.
- Offer continuous feedback. Let your staff members know how they're doing and where they stand.
- Make the extra effort. When you go out of your way to assist a staff member or incur some personal inconvenience you are conveying a message that the success of your staff is your highest priority and that the real reason that you're a supervisor is to help them.

## Raising Morale Through Delegation

The very nature of your tasks and responsibilities demands that some decision-making authority be turned over to your staff. The ability to delegate successfully will decrease your workload while increasing the productivity and morale of those you supervise. Many supervisors, especially first-time supervisors, fear using delegation because they don't fully trust their staff or they've always been effective at taking care of everything themselves and can't break the habit of doing it all.

It's useful at this point to review the definition of supervisor. As generally understood, "A supervisor is one who tells people what to do and how to do it. A supervisor directly oversees the work of one or more individual employees while also maintaining many of his/her own operating duties—all in the connection with the performance of a single cohesive function." Now, using this definition and acknowledging the principle of operating at the highest skill level, a supervisor's responsibility for delegation becomes clear. Operating at the highest skill level essentially means that "no one should perform a task that can be performed just as well by someone who is paid less." Thus the supervisor who continues to "do it all" and avoids delegation when a staff member could in fact handle the task, is supervising

poorly and is likely incurring higher costs for his/her department or organization.

What then, does the successful supervisor do to delegate effectively?

- Delegate to employees who show enthusiasm, initiative and ability to handle and balance several tasks at once.
- Delegate enough authority for successful completion of the task by allowing key employees to make their own decisions, take initiative and continue operating even in your own absence.
- Delegate on a piecemeal basis—ensuring that employees are able to effectively handle what has been delegated to them and do not feel that they have been swamped or overloaded. Then as competence is demonstrated increasing the complexity and frequency of the tasks to be delegated.
- Preparing your staff for delegation. This involves prior assessment of the employee's skills, interests and needs. You can even ask employees what new tasks and responsibilities they would like to assume.
- Spending extra time with those employees who are undertaking new challenges so that in a long term the delegation process proves effective.

#### **Demotivation**

While the management and psychological theorists maintain that we can only do so much to help "motivate" our staff and that motivation lies within, it is entirely possible to demotivate staff through poor practices and behavior. Demotivation means any reduction in enthusiasm, initiative or output on the part of your staff as a result of something you've done. Here are some ways that demotivation may occur:

- Scolding or belittling a staff member particularly when others are manipulative of others
- Being preoccupied with your own activities while appearing selfish or manipulative of others
- Maintaining a favorite among your staff that is obvious to everyone
- Being callous or insensitive to employees' needs
- Being indecisive when swift or

forceful action is called for

- Discussing shortcomings of one employee with another
- Using a staff member's employment to coerce him/her to perform
- Stifling employees' expression, ideas and growth.

#### **Supervisor as Leader**

Professor Burt Scanlon of the University of Oklahoma has developed a leadership checklist that dovetails nicely with the supervisor's role as a motivational facilitator:

- Do I give employees adequate support?
- Do employees understand how to do the task assigned?
- Have I spelled out what's expected in terms of results?
- What have I done to cultivate a positive relationship?
- Does my staff have adequate freedom in which to work?
- What have I done to mentally and emotionally involve the staff in their jobs?
- Have employees been allowed to participate in setting goals and deciding means of achieving them?
- Have I shown adequate concern for employees as individuals?
- Have I shown adequate concern for employees' personal goals?
- Have I accurately assessed employees' strengths and weaknesses so that tasks are assigned which capitalize on strengths?
- Have I adequately and reasonably challenged my staff?

*Dr. Anthony Alessandra, full-time speaker, has delivered over 750 professional speeches, authored five books including Non-Manipulative Selling and The Business of Selling, and recorded 10 audiocassette albums including "Relationship Strategies" and "Non-Manipulative Selling" (Nightingale-Conant). For more information call or write to: Alessandra & Associates, P.O. Box 2767, La Jolla, CA 92038. Telephone 1-800-222-4383; in California dial 619-459-4515.*

*Jeffrey P. Davidson, speaker and Certified Management Consultant in Falls Church, Virginia, is author of Checklist Management: The 8-Hour Manager, published by National Press. He is also co-author of Marketing Your Consulting and Professional Services published by John Wiley and Sons.*