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**MOTIVATING STAFF TO PEAK PERFORMANCE**

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Your success as a business owner, executive or professional will be enhanced by motivated employees. Unmotivated employees can unwittingly destroy quality relationships with current clients, prospective clients, vendors, creditors, shareholders and peers. On the other hand, motivated employees not only enhance your relationships with others, they make the day more enjoyable and motivate you to greater heights.

In an effort to motivate employees, many businesses lean toward a competitive approach. While a competitive spirit can be motivational, it can also produce jealousy and significant frustration. Some businesses experiment with contests to motivate for short term successes. The winners of contests are often rewarded with weekend holidays or cash bonuses. While these contests may reward a few “winners,” they create many more “losers.” And losing is frustrating. Sometimes it’s immobilizing. Long-term motivation is rarely the result of short-term financial rewards. The competitive spirit needs to be balanced with a more widespread and equitable motivator.

In my experience, one remarkably powerful motivator is the anticipation of long-term safety. We all want to feel safe. The desire for safety is indelibly etched, in our primal being. Hence the rule – Safety FIRST. Accepting this principal, the leader’s responsibility is to create a physically and emotionally safe environment. While physical safety won’t be addressed in this article, following are some tips for motivating through emotional safety.

One way is to offer sincere compliments. While this may sound obvious, I regularly meet people who use sarcasm and criticism as a motivator. They never acknowledge the good. As I work with employees across the country, I am regularly reminded that positive, sincere feedback builds self-esteem which in turn, creates loyalty, energy and a drive for superior performance.

Another source of emotional security is proactive employee input. Smart leaders seek out suggestions from every level of the organization. This is not accomplished by a suggestion box. All employees should formally participate in long-term planning. Not only will the employer receive new ideas, but also, employees will feel that their opinions are heard and will enjoy a sense of control in their lives and in their destinies.

A third source of emotional security is consistent rational leadership. Bosses who fly off the handle not only lose employee respect, but also create concerns about effective decision making under stress. Alternatively, bosses who keep their cool create a safe environment. This does not mean that bosses are not allowed to express concerns or even fears. It does mean that bosses must express negative issues with emotional constraint.

Affiliation is yet another source. Employees who are part of a team don't feel alone in the trenches. All employees need the satisfaction of regularly meeting with a variety of the members of an organization – not just their immediate departments. Contact with a large sphere creates additional bonds. When the members of a community are well-acquainted, they are more likely to feel safe.

As a final suggestion, offer training and development courses for your employees. Give people an opportunity to improve their lives. Promote creativity and a willingness to experiment with new ideas. Employees who grow in their work feel more secure.

By offering a safe environment for your employees you'll be rewarded financially and emotionally and feel the security of having created a well-run organization with expectations of long term success.