

Supervisor's Network **NYU**

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NYU Human Resources

Building Morale. Employees universally need motivation and inspiration. They need something to believe in — a sense of belonging and purpose. In high morale workplaces, people feel valued and productivity thrives. With a committed effort, supervisors have the ability to build and sustain morale among their direct reports and contribute to the overall success of the University.

SUPERVISOR'S CHALLENGE

The day-to-day functions of your school or unit are necessary and ongoing. However, supervisors are realizing how much it matters for them to be sensitive to the people who work with them and to promote a feeling of community and caring. Today, a supervisor's challenge is creating and maintaining morale in a workplace that may be enveloped by anxieties over change, reorganization, loss of job security, new technology, and the strain of always having to do more with less.

As someone in a leadership role, you need to make high morale a priority if you want to get the most from your employees. A high morale workplace is an environment that engenders excellence and fosters collaboration and a desire to contribute, where employees feel motivated to work hard and smart. Such environments are shaped by intelligent supervisors who recognize the psychological and practical payoffs of high morale.

KEY TERM: MORALE

How an individual feels about his or her work and the organization. If morale is low, participation is likely to be limited to doing what is required or otherwise expected. Conversely, high morale suggests that individuals will participate with enthusiasm and a sense of commitment.

BOOSTING MORALE TO INCREASE RETENTION RATES

Here are a few suggestions that may help retention regardless of the job market or economic conditions:

- > **Explain to employees how the organization works.** Educate and engage your employees. Morale bumps up a notch when people know how they are involved in the overall process and feel part of a bigger, more important picture. They are also less likely to leave.
- > **Get to know your employees.** Interact with people beyond the work tasks at hand. Whether it is an occasional lunch or regular get-togethers or celebrations, you will be creating a climate of trust and gaining insights into your people—and that can be valuable for any supervisor.
- > **Know the names of everyone who works for you.** It does not matter if the work group consists of a few employees or a few hundred, supervisors should know them all. Be aware of nicknames or nontraditional pronunciations. If you notice others calling John “Jack,” ask him what he prefers.
- > **From day one, be clear on your expectations.** This is a key retention tactic that supervisors need to hone. From the start, new employees must understand what is expected of them and how their performance will be measured. Managers need to communicate those expectations right up front, succinctly and clearly, if they want new hires to become longtime, motivated employees.

KEEP IT INTERESTING

Employees want good jobs that keep their interests high and maximize their talents and abilities. They want jobs that will help them to develop and fulfill their greatest potential. When they find themselves in undesirable, dead-end jobs, they will most likely disconnect or leave. Jobs can get stagnant, so supervisors may need to come up with inventive new ways to redesign jobs if they are to keep their stars and motivate them to perform at their personal best.

Techniques for Redesigning Jobs

- > **Mix it up and add variety.** Whenever possible, keep jobs multitask and multitalent driven. Typically, the more skills required to do a job, the more satisfied the employee. The challenge is finding the right combination of talents that an employee enjoys using and then matching those talents to the needs of the job. One approach may be to ask the employee to suggest his or her desired mix of skills and activities that may make doing a job more interesting.
- > **Detail the purpose and pride associated with the job.** As the supervisor, it is important that you convey to your work group the larger purpose of their efforts. If that is not evident up front, employees may never see the greater objective of their work. One way to accomplish this is to stress the true significance of a job and its specific impact on the lives of others, whether those people are within or outside the organization.
- > **Give people more responsibility, not just more work.** Let employees take more responsibility for coming up with their own work methods, deciding on standards of excellence, and then determining when they have achieved them. The objective here is to enrich their work with empowerment and authority. It is not about handing off more tasks. Responsibility enriches jobs and builds employee morale.
- > **Give them the freedom to care and to grow.** Liberate employees from management’s authority whenever possible. When employees take on personal responsibility, they become more accountable and more interested in their jobs; when they are stifled and micromanaged, their spirit for the job slowly dies.

SUPERVISORS HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT ON MORALE

Employees want to feel that who they are and what they do matter to their leaders. They want to come to a workplace each day where they feel cared about and appreciated. Regardless of your leadership role, you have an opportunity to touch the lives of those around you every day. As a leader, you have the power to promote a more meaningful, joyful, and high-morale workplace.

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THE SUPERVISOR'S BOOKSHELF

Consult these relevant books for more ideas about building morale.

The Enthusiastic Employee: How Companies Profit by Giving Workers What They Want

by David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind,
and Michael Irwin Meltzer

The Enthusiastic Employee draws on 30 years of research and experience to show you exactly what managers do wrong—and what they should do instead. Drawing on detailed case studies and employee attitude surveys in hundreds of companies, the authors offer research-proven solutions to motivate employees in the workplace.

PEARSON EDUCATION, 2005

**The Servant Leader:
How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom Line Performance**

by James A. Autry

In *The Servant Leader*, top-selling author, former Fortune 500 executive, and business consultant James A. Autry shows you how to manage with respect and honesty and how to empower employees to achieve new levels of satisfaction. Autry claims "servant leadership" will produce fulfilling emotional, psychological, and spiritual rewards for everyone involved.

THREE RIVERS PRESS (CA), 2004

The Incentive Toolkit

by Andy O'Bryan

Author Andy O'Bryan shares his dozen years of experience implementing incentive and motivational programs for employees, which, he says, can improve morale and overall employee satisfaction. Plain-spoken, to-the-point, and packed with creative ideas you can call your own, *The Incentive Toolkit* can be a handy employee motivation desk reference for supervisors in any organization.

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