

Motivate and Inspire!

My son came home from work yesterday swearing and fuming. I asked him what had happened and he said "Nothing! That's the trouble – I work my b...s off, do everything I'm supposed to do and a whole lot more besides and what do I get? Nothing!"

A few weeks ago he was raving about his boss because he had put in all sorts of incentives to get his teams to work more effectively and rewarded them with bonuses and small gifts. My son came home on a high almost every day. When I asked what had changed about his boss's behaviour, my son replied, "He seems to just **expect** us to work extra hard all the time now and he doesn't even notice."

Talking to other managers and coaches, it seems that in the search to find something that motivates and inspires a person they can run the whole gamut of offering expensive prizes to guilt trips and threats only to find that motivation eludes them. However, as managers, motivation is part of our job, isn't it? So what can we do? The great news is that the answer to motivating and inspiring our teams is so simple it is often overlooked. It is, quite simply

Regular praise and recognition.

Unfortunately, this simple method is not one that comes easily to many managers. All too often if we are looking at performance and targets we become aware of people's shortcomings and struggle to find things to praise. We set off with good intentions and then forget to follow through.

The other catch is that although we are aware of the value of an activity, it doesn't mean that we do it regularly. We acknowledge that it's no good going on a diet or exercising frantically just before a holiday but we still expect someone to jump to it and perform to order just because once in a while we tell them how good they are.

Making **regular** praise and recognition a habit really does pay off though.

One Executive Manager, renowned for the superb team spirit amongst her people, credits much of her success to what she calls her 'hug notes'. She has a stock of little cards that she sends promptly whenever she 'catches someone doing good' and has some rules she sticks to when she is sending them to ensure the recognition she gives is effective. She strongly advises that the praise is timely, appropriate and deserved (shower praise for no good reason and it soon becomes meaningless). She also stresses the importance of making her comments very specific and says that the more meaningful it is the more likely the good performance will be repeated. Finally she suggests never overlooking the value of using someone's name and making the comments very personal. For example "Mary, I was so proud of you when I heard you dealing with your customer Mr. Jones so well this morning. It wasn't an easy situation and I'm sure your actions went a long way to making sure he'll be happy to recommend our company to others and that is so important to us all. Thank you!"

Another Manager set himself the goal of finding at least three occasions in any one day to actively reward or recognise someone. He kept a ready supply of motivational and inspirational cards and appropriate gifts to enable him to do it with ease. He put reminder notes through his diary, and then recorded who he'd recognised, how, and why. This not only kept him on track in establishing the habit, but also helped avoid duplication and ensure everyone was recognised at an appropriate level.

I once read that a famous author keeps a supply of postcards in his pocket and, as he travels the world, wherever he encounters good service, he writes a little note directly to the person who has served him. He discovered that people have treasured his notes for years and now finds exceptional service almost everywhere he goes!

So, having decided that this simple method is the one you will use to motivate and inspire, how can you incorporate it into your regular activities?

My favourite method is one I heard from a manager who swears by her 'Ra Ra Kit'! That's short for 'Reward and Recognition Action Kit'. This is simply a clear plastic box that sits in pride of place on her desk as a visual prompt to practice praise! She also recommends putting together a list of different words and phrases that you can use to express praise and thanks. For inspiration, check out any wording on cards you've received yourself or pool ideas with colleagues.

Ideas for your own 'Recognition & Reward Kit' :

Motivational and Inspirational Cards *

Postage Stamps

Small, Meaningful Gifts *

Small, Appropriate Confectionary Packs ... Smarties, Lucky Stars, Celebrations etc

List of wording ideas

Notebook (to record your actions)

** (I can recommend www.inspiredcardandgift.co.uk as a useful source of appropriate cards and gifts at very reasonable prices.)*

If your success is measured by your team's success, then it is clear that every accomplishment should be recognised. A manager who knows how to draw out the best in team members usually knows how to show appreciation for their efforts. Regular, meaningful appreciation is both a skill and an art and could be the vital ingredient in helping your team to achieve the success you know they are capable of.

Look out for more articles on leadership and team management!

Ann Hawkins

August 2007

Ann is contributor to 'Inspired!' – an independent e-zine dedicated to helping people in direct sales to build great incomes. Check out the site on www.directsales-inspiration.com