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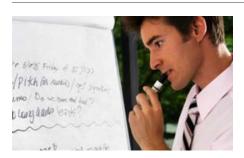
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Motivate Employees With Goal-Setting
By Toddi Gutner

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Find out how setting meaningful goals for your business and employees can drive better performance and higher productivity.

Think back to the days you were in school. It's likely you had a goal to work hard enough to get the best grade you could (if you're type A, chances are you aimed for the A). But once you moved into the work world, the guidelines for goal-setting probably became a bit more difficult.

Even though evidence shows that people perform best when they're given goals to achieve — at work, home or school — a large percentage of employees still feel like they lack specific goals at their jobs.

So given that it's a win-win for both the employer and employee to set goals, what's the best way your company can motivate employees and create meaningful targets? The following guidelines can help:

Communicate the company's mission and goals

It's not surprising that the goals of an organization are often extremely different from those of the individual. To make sure employees are engaged in the goal-setting process, "the goals really have to be aligned with the mission, vision and strategy of the organization," says Dr. Maynard Brusman, a business consulting psychologist and executive coach.

To that end, there must be a well-defined and communicated mission embedded in the company culture so that both the employer and employees are starting on the same page. "When the employee understands the strategic objectives of the firm, then they are setting their goals against the target goals of their company," says John Millikin, clinical professor in the management department at the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University.

Initiate a collaborative conversation

Research shows that employees will respond much better to goal-setting if they have participated in the process. The bottom line is that there needs to be dialogue between the employer and the employee.

"The goal is for both parties to have a say and ultimately for the manager to have a final say as to what is most important," says Brad Karsh, president of JB Training Solutions. Within the conversation, find out what intrinsically motivates people. "You have to get buy-in from the employees," says Brusman.

Set SMART goals

A well-known acronym in the human resources business, SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant (to the job and business) and Time-bound (or Time-related — there are variations). Use this as a guide when working with employees to set goals.

It's especially important for the goals you set to be specific, otherwise "an employee might think they have hit the goal when they didn't really achieve what you had in mind," says Deb Brown, a business coach in South Florida. To help achieve the agreed-upon targets, it may be necessary to break up the larger goals into smaller ones that are achieved per quarter, month, week or day.

Be a role model

Nobody appreciates leaders who operate under the philosophy of "do as I say, not as I do." "I've seen resentment build when the leaders aren't doing anything," says Daniel Crosby, corporate psychologist and leadership development

consultant. "The leader sets the ceiling for organizational goals," he says.

Create recognition programs

We all like to be rewarded for a job we've done well. Why wait for the annual performance review to comment on the success of employees in your goal-setting program? To that end, "establish a clear system of recognition or rewards for people who are meeting those goals every step of the way," says Brown.

In addition, realize that the process is dynamic for both the company and the individual. As the goals of an organization change, so should those of the employee, says Millikin. Finally, it's OK to push your employees, as they have high expectations in the workplace as well. "A lot of studies have shown that employees set higher goals than their managers," says Crosby.

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