

## **(Plan Your Career) Motivate employees when money is tight**

Written by Julie Desmond

Thursday, 19 November 2009 15:52

---

One of my favorite recruiting projects was also the most challenging. I was responsible for providing over 100 accountants to an international firm during a time when, unlike now, no one was looking for work. When my team seemed close to giving up, I casually initiated the Where's Waldo trophy. I took a Waldo figurine from my kid's happy meal and put it on a file cabinet where it was easily seen by everyone on the team. Each time someone filled a position, they got to keep Waldo at their desk – until someone else filled a position. This was cheap, easy, fun competition and it was an absurdly effective motivator.

When money is tight, managers trying to motivate employees spend a lot of time hitting their heads against the wall. The bruises on my forehead have healed, but the lessons learned about motivating people are still with me. Can you get results from people, even if you can't offer more money? Most studies show money is only a short-term motivator. While everyone's happy to take bonus cash, there are other ways to get results.

Your management style matters more than your expertise. Lead from the front by being visible, especially when employees are expected to put in overtime. Bringing dinner for the team once in a while is more motivating if you join them in wolfing it down.

Be available either physically or by phone whenever your team is working. They may have a quick question or a serious problem, but either way you want to respond quickly. If your group succeeds, you look good. If they fail, how do you look then? Be there when they need you.

Be clear about your expectations. Beginning in 7th grade math class, people learned to ask, Why are we doing this? The more transparent your vision is, the more buy-in you will have from your team. People who understand the expected outcome will be more willing to slog through the mud of a slow or detailed or seemingly inane process to get there.

Be attentive because your best allies might be your complainers. The same crew who feels frustrated by a process probably has a better solution on how to get it done. If you can turn a frustration into a solution, your team can move ahead more effectively, and your complainer will know his insight is appreciated.

Relinquish control and get other people to do their work better than you can. If the project goes off track, ask questions to ensure that the team understands its goals. Back off strict reporting and meeting timelines if they become an obstacle to real results.

Managers, take care of your team as you would yourselves. They have lives outside of work, you know. Look for ways to integrate families into the work experience, add fun to every day and recognize every contribution. The results you're after will come your way, and you won't have to break the bank to see it happen.

Julie Desmond is Director of Career Planning Resources for Help Wanted! Workshop. Send your questions or comments to [julie@insightnews.com](mailto:julie@insightnews.com).