



Nicole Kobie

# How to be a great motivator

Keeping employees motivated - through the good and the bad - is not always easy...

**S**taying motivated at work isn't easy - now more than ever. Indeed, surveys suggest a third of Brits don't feel motivated in their current role.

This is a problem exacerbated by looming threats of redundancies as the economy teeters on the brink and also isn't helped by a lack of support from colleagues and managers while working from home.

"Employee motivation is critical through any recession, but when you have a degree of lockdown on top, then the challenge is much greater," says Andy Davies, senior vice president at HR firm MHR.

Addressing that challenge isn't easy, requiring a personalised approach - after all, what motivates one employee may frustrate another. "No two

employees are exactly the same and even in the toughest of business conditions, managers need to personalise their approach, building on their understanding of what motivates employees as individuals," Davies says.

Motivating a team is the prime responsibility of a leader, according to Jake Third, managing director at Hallam, who also stresses how important it is to know what really matters to your colleagues.

"Once you understand what they want, find that sweet spot where the organisation's goals and their personal goals overlap," he says.

"If their own personal ambitions are in alignment with the company's objectives, they will naturally want to win for the company."

While a personal touch is key to finding out what motivates specific employees, good managers can also lead from the top.

"I make motivation the core of my message in all settings and remind my teams through personal stories that we are all in the same situation," says Brandon Bekker, senior vice president of cyber security firm Mimecast.

"I like to talk about what our legacy will be and what we will do now so we're proud to tell our grandkids about it."

## Get talking

Communication is core to understanding what motivates staff, and though we may be working remotely, at least we have the tools to keep in touch.

Dean Shillingford, head of people and culture at Bitstocks, says his company uses Monday and Slack to coordinate projects, but also Slack and Google Hangouts for social

meetups, including a film club, quiz, and Friday morning workout.

"These tools don't take the place of talking via video chats, with all heads of departments being reminded of the importance of listening to their team members and keeping in touch with them on a personal level, as well as about work-related matters," he adds.

Socialising can help, agrees Nikki Thorpe, people operations manager at Planday. "Social teams are special teams and if your business is used to getting together after work for a drink, that shouldn't change if you're in self-isolation," she says.

"Get everyone together via video conference and bring a drink of choice and have a chat and a laugh as you normally would."

## More than money

What motivates employees?

Research suggests a few common threads - and money, benefits, flexible working, the chance of promotion, and recognition are all well proven motivators.

Research sponsored by SMELoans shows half of Brits see salary as their biggest motivator, followed by flexible working, having a boss they enjoy working with, and a short commute.

But there could be more to it.

A survey by MyKindaFuture reveals 57% of people are more motivated when they feel like they belong in their workplace, suggesting that building a sense of community really matters.

"People are now increasingly looking for more meaning and purpose in their professional lives - in other words, they feel motivated by knowing that they are making a contribution and a difference," says James Hallahan, director of Hays IT.

Research by Hays IT found that 74% of respondents reported that an organisation's purpose which aligns to their personal motivations is important when considering a role.

Given budgets are constrained, Hallahan added that it's worth looking for ways beyond monetary reward to recognise good work.

"When financial benefits may not be possible, look for other ways to ensure your team know that you notice their efforts and care about their career,"



he says. "Especially during these times of uncertainty, it is vital to give credit where it's due to keep morale high."

John McLachlan, co-founder of Monkey Puzzle Training, worked with Strathclyde University last year to see how motivation evolves - and he found that core motivations largely stick with someone.

"I found that people are motivated by different needs, like power (such as control and influence), achievement (such as work quality and continuous improvement), and affiliation (forging strong relationships), and this doesn't change over time," he says.

However, it's very important to remember that some priorities may shift during a recession.

"Some employees will become fixated on keeping their jobs while others will still look for personal satisfaction or want extra pay for extra work," Davies adds.

"It is all about knowing your employees and their qualities as individuals before the external economic or social pressures arise."

## Mental health matters

Because of the current situation, McLachlan says that some of the companies he works with are struggling to get employees to take time off, as it feels "pointless" when staff can't use their annual leave

allocation to travel or visit family.

But managers shouldn't mistake this for motivation, he warns. "It is detrimental to their overall wellbeing and productivity," he says.

"All of this coupled with people fearing they might lose their jobs [or] not get promoted if they aren't demonstrating how effective they are, is driving more people to work compulsively, which can lead to burnout." Indeed, it would seem that fear really isn't a positive motivator, after all.

Some employees may lose focus, feel distracted, and lack motivation right now - and that's perfectly understandable, given the tough year we've all shared.

"I've really had to keep reminding everyone that they're human and we're in a very unique situation right now," says Shillingford.

"One of our core business values is community, so our employee mental health and well being is hugely important."

That's why Thorpe believes that managers can check in with staff every day, even if it's a quick note or simple catch-up. "Keeping in touch with your team and caring for their mental health and balance is every bit as important as measuring the productivity and success of the tasks they have to complete," she says.