

When Free Doughnuts and Casual Fridays Aren't Enough: How to Motivate Your Employees

The employer-employee relationship is fodder for all types of comic writing. It's a complicated relationship demanding a difficult combination of direction, criticism, praise, compensation, and friendship. Satirists have made millions poking fun at the many ways the mentor-mentee connection can go horribly wrong (think Steve Carell on *The Office*). Here, we offer ten ways you can be the most-loved manager in the industry while also increasing employee productivity. Yes, you *can* do both.

1. **Dole out numerous (but sincere) Attaboys!** Pride in an employee is like gasoline in a car. People need to feel that their contribution, no matter how small or large, is valued. Celebrate successes and let your employees know when you are proud of them. Likewise, feel pride in what you are doing. It's contagious.
2. **Stock the break room and check the thermostat.** A strong manager makes sure that his or her employees' lower-level needs are met. Beyond their salary and job security, employees need to have a welcoming work environment. The inability to meet higher-level needs, such as personal growth and professional progress, can often be blamed on neglecting those requirements that are more basic.
3. **Aim to adjust behaviors, not personalities.** Employees are just people. They are feeling, emotional beings like you. All are motivated, but their motivations are as varied as their appearances. Successful managers need to allow employees to be themselves. Aim criticisms and praise at actions, not intentions or emotions.
4. **Listen. To. Every. Word.** Whether it's a telephone call, a meeting, or a simple how-was-your-weekend discussion, a strong manager listens and hears everything. Listening helps you understand employees' attitudes and actions, and knowing the details of their lives also shows that you care. And you do. That, alone, is a huge motivator.
5. **Hash it out.** It's a common misconception that ignoring conflict in the workplace will make it go away. Wrong. Your job as a strong manager is to make contact with your employees and address problematic behaviors that inhibit productivity. In order to do this, you must open that office door and build a rapport that will enable you to head conflict off at the pass.
6. **Let them do the thinking.** If you want to optimize the talent in your place of work, then you have to encourage its use. Too often, managers underestimate the strategic and creative thinking abilities of their employees. Involve your staff in discussions and decisions. When decisions are made without them, take the time to inform them about the direction of the company. The closer they feel to the fulcrum of power, the more invested (and productive) they become.
7. **Keep it on the down-low and build trust.** Like any relationship, the success of an employer-employee relationship is based on trust. Be discreet about all aspects of their lives and performance. Take your employees into your confidence occasionally. Ask advice about business matters. Let them contribute.
8. **Geo-caching anyone?** Everybody loves a field trip! When you sense your team needs a morale boost (and a break), organize something that encourages them to work together toward a common goal. Ropes courses are the conventional team-building excursion, but geo-caching is gaining popularity. Using natural and technological resources, teams race

from one point of interest to another (similar to television's *The Amazing Race*). Nothing boosts morale like working together while having a great time.

- 9. Show me the incentive program!** Money isn't everything. And although every employee loves a monetary bonus, the happiness it provides is short-lived. Instead, consider creating a program with stepped rewards. Let employees list things they'd like, and award some prizes to the entire group (for group goals achieved) and some to individuals (for high individual productivity). Everybody loves to win.
- 10. Toss out just a few more *Attaboys!*** Yes, it is that important. The more you let your people know just how vital they are, the more important they will feel. And the more important they feel, the better they will produce. Instilling confidence in employees yields tremendous productivity results. Additionally, celebrating their successes will make it that much easier for you to critique their mistakes.

You're armed and ready now. Open that office door, check to see that the heat is on, ask your employees what they think about the company's newest innovation, and tell someone that he or she is doing a spectacular job. Really. Be ready to be loved *and* productive. As an employer, can it get any better than that?