

Improve employee morale

Low morale is what most managers don't want to hear when esprit among their employees is being discussed. Organisations whose morale is considered low usually lack achievement, motivation and a sense of real purpose. Also, the turnover of their employees is usually high.

Though reversing these trends will take time, you can be assured of success if you act on the following:

1. Become a morale missionary

Morale is a group phenomenon but an individual matter. We speak of high morale in a group – meaning that most of the people in the group have a good sense of esprit. Group morale, however, depends on the morale of each individual in the group. This is best achieved through the personal missionary work of the manager. Inspirational talks and group initiatives such as projects, services and clubs can help; but unless the manager is there working with individual employees, group morale is not likely to improve.

2. Identify issues – not the outcome

Morale is the outcome. Issues are the things contributing to that outcome. Employees may attribute the cause of low morale to the turn-around time on decision-making, the constant changing of priorities without consultation, the lack of training, inflexible procedures, the incorrect mix of resources and people, or poor communication. Focus on identifying the issues, and you will have a much better chance of improving the situation and boosting morale.

3. Measure morale before trying to manage it

You may decide to use commercially available tools to measure the effect that the issues have on productivity, or you may opt to design your own. Whatever your decision, it is best to use such instruments to get an accurate picture of the issues and the associated problems. As management experts say, "If you can't measure it you can't manage it".

4. Build self-confidence and security

Job security and a feeling of confidence in one's ability to handle the day-to-day incidents of life and work are key elements in good employee morale. You can provide this feeling – by training staff to do their jobs effectively, showing them the importance of their jobs to the organisation, and demonstrating your confidence in them.

5. Set priorities – and be seen as supportive

By establishing priorities, you help people make molehills out of mountains. Issues confronting employees will generally fall into three broad categories:

- Those that they will not be able to influence at all.
- Those over which they have very little influence.
- Those that they can influence.



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Help employees to live with what they cannot change, and take specific actions to remedy what they or you can change. Finally, communicate your feelings and those of your staff to the people who can change things that are out of your control.

6. Establish work groups

The essence of high morale is participation and the feeling of being wanted. The interdependencies created by people working in groups help build bonds and enthusiasm among group members. In turn, other aspects of workplace life will be affected – absenteeism will reduce, cohesiveness will increase, and morale will improve.

7. Encourage action

Nothing succeeds like success, so get runs on the board as soon as possible. Empower groups to recommend and act on a variety of issues. Not that you abrogate all responsibility to the groups, but if a group has been formed to deal with an issue, lend your support and acknowledge achievement.

8. Keep employees informed

Communication is the lifeblood of any organisation, so make sure that employees have all the information they need to function effectively. An open, honest and caring environment promotes esprit de corps.

9. Remain alert to the morale factor

Morale changes – sometimes daily – so you can't rest on your laurels when you think a crisis has been averted. Stay in touch with day-to-day events, and watch for changes in morale.

And don't forget:

- Establish fair policies and administrative practices.
- Encourage employees to discuss their problems.
- Help employees to guard against failure.
- Protect employees against unfair criticism.
- Develop a sense of purpose and solidarity.
- Keep jobs interesting, with new challenges, new authorities and new responsibilities.
- Be friendly and appreciative of employee efforts.
- Recognise the effect on morale of reassignments, redundancies and dismissals.
- Encourage promotion from within.

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Gain employee commitment
- Leadership – introduction
- Motivate employees