

7 Unusual Ways to Motivate Your Employees

Start A 'Mini-CEO' Program

When an employee has a new idea for how to do business, Brian Halligan, CEO of Hubspot, a marketing software firm in Boston, sometimes chooses to fire that employee from his or her day job, and appoint that person 'CEO' of a new in-house start-up. Part of creating this environment of innovation is making the organization decentralized and flat, Halligan told Inc. "We want to empower the edges of the organization, and we want to let the people who really understand our customers make decisions."

Make 'Fun' Part of Your Business Model

When fun is a regular part of work, employees get to know each other as real people, Paul Spiegelman, CEO of Beryl Companies, told Inc. To that end, Spiegelman created a 'Department of Great People and Fun' and instituted 'Pajama' day and 'Dress like the 70s' day. While these ideas are not practical for every work environment, the key is to do something fun, no matter how small, on a regular basis, he says.

Give the Company to Your Employees

Ever think about giving your company to your employees? It's called an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) and may be an attractive way to motivate them, since the structure allows direct profits from the company's success. Foss Miller, founder of Sawbones Worldwide, did it for Christmas in 2010. "So many of the employees have worked here for many, many years," he told Inc. "Providing them a great retirement when they leave, it just made more sense and felt better and better."

Do Something Crazy

Eric Ryan, founder of Method, a soap and cleaning products company in San Francisco, thinks adding some weirdness to your corporate culture inspires employees to accomplish a lot. In the past, Ryan hasn't hesitated to dress up as a chipmunk, blast Eye of the Tiger in the elevator, or host flash mob dance parties at his offices. It reminds everybody that, "Yeah, I'm working somewhere really special", he told Inc.

Write to Them By Hand

Stanley McChrystal, the retired four-star U.S. Army general who served as commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, was once 'boss' to more than 150,000 service members. But that didn't stop him from losing touch with his subordinates. The general says he sent out more than 2,000 thank-you notes to his troops each year. "I used to get thank-you notes for my thank-you notes," he said in his keynote speech at the 2011 Inc. 500 | 5000 Conference. "I'd find them framed in [the troops' bunk] areas."

Let Them Rest

Though it may seem counterintuitive, napping may be an excellent way to motivate your workforce. In fact, plenty of companies, both large and small, have created 'nap rooms' where employees can catch a quick snooze, even if only for 15 minutes. Zephirin Lasker, CEO of a Pontiflex, a 60-person mobile app ad shop in Brooklyn, converted a room of computer servers into a napping retreat. "I'm a huge believer in napping," Lasker tells Inc.com. "It helps people recharge, and personally, it helps me think more creatively."

Mentor Everyone

Mentorship helps employees connect with other staffers and pushes them to think outside their traditional roles. At Allen & Gerritsen, a brand strategy agency in Watertown, Mass., even CEO Andrew Graff has a mentor: 22-year-old technology strategist Eric Leist. "We have a great group of diverse people here," one Allen & Gerritsen employee told Advertising Age, which first reported this. "We have wonderful work/life balance and a senior management team and HR department that always look for reasons to celebrate and provide us opportunities to smell the roses."

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