

## How to Resolve the Morale Issue at Work

By Drew Stevens, PhD

Emerson once wrote that “nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” A majority of the issues related to worker productivity stem from enthusiasm or the lack thereof. Many individuals simply go to work despite their abhorrence of their employers, the monotony, and the products. There is no passion or pride.



Much of this issue stems from practices embedded within a given organization's culture. These include:

- Leadership not serving as exemplars — Some leaders today are narcissistic, demeaning, and ruthless. More importantly, some leaders' salaries exceed those for low-level employees by hundreds of times. Leaders need to act in harmony with employees and ensure equal treatment for all. Companies where this sort of good policy is put into practice include McDonalds, Fed Ex, and UPS, major corporations where employees and management are one.
- Little or no accountability — The United States economic system is currently in tremendous turmoil, and no one is being held (or holding themselves) accountable. Employees need to know that mistakes may count for learning but that criminals will be punished for repeat offenses.
- Career planning and succession planning is null — Simply put, there is no succession planning. Most CEOs and senior managers join an organization from competitive industries and companies. Whatever happened to the mailroom climb?
- Too many silos and departmental infighting — Companies are in business for one reason — to create clients. End the infighting and focus on the most vital asset! When the fighting ends (and everybody understands their reason for being employed), harmony arrives.

The causes of low morale correlate to the organization, its culture, and its management. After 25 years of research in this area, five factors have been found that make the primary contributions to organizational morale. A study by the Corporate Leadership Council has revealed, for example, the tremendous impact managers have on an employee's level of commitment. It is imperative to note that individuals typically do not leave companies — they leave poor managers. Organizational mismanagement contributes

to negative morale. As recently as 2006, the Gallup Organization estimated that there were 32 million actively disengaged employees, costing the American economy up to \$350 billion per year in lost productivity. Such losses included absenteeism, tardiness, and poor work.

To dilute the productivity impact, research shows that taking time to build relationships with employees through personal interaction is a key step managers can take. Employees need to feel trust and respect from their managers. Employees want feedback from management that tells them that their work matters.

Improving morale is not always easy, but there are cures:

1. Begin with talent acquisition — Start with the right people. No firm we work with ever hires on a proactive basis. Most firms conduct employment searches reactively. Seek employees that fit with the organizational culture and have the obligatory skills. Never wait!
2. Hire for skill — Talent is innate. Organizations hire for personality and behavior first and skill second. Skill is not interchangeable, behavior is. A great hire might have a wonderful temperament and lack the skill to plug a plug into an outlet. I recall a five star hotel that sought advice to correct housekeeping flaws. After five minutes, it was easy enough to terminate staff and find those without flaws.
3. Look at best practices from the best people — Management focuses on “fixing those that cannot” rather than “improving those that can.” Paragons of performance exist in your organization. Discover what they do right and encourage others to emulate it.
4. Passion — In the 1980s, Sylvester Stallone appeared again as Rocky, this time with a theme song called “Eye of the Tiger.” What a great metaphor for valuable talent. Seek to acquire talent that truly loves work. Passion, too, is innate. Employees must love what they do and how they do it. When passion is high, so, too, is morale.





## Career Tips

5. Focus on the customer — Managers, the organization, and employees must vehemently focus on the customer. Remember Winnie the Pooh? Try finding an Eeyore amongst the staff at Disney, Southwest Airlines, or FedEx, all companies whose employees focus intensely on serving the client.

Managers must constantly strive to provide feedback to employees. Feedback, however, is not just an annual performance review. It is imperative that daily communication exists for good information and improvement. Coaching, counseling, and mentoring are components of organizational morale. In addition, many attend church and hear the words "It is right to give thanks and praise." Many watch professional sports and see coaches coddling athletes. We can learn something here: simple words of thanks and praise constantly improve morale and employee relationships.

Finally, the first item terminated during economic volatility is training, but research has found that employees are assets and require that direction. So, never stop training, as training improves productivity and morale at all times.

Issues of low morale and productivity are onerous, volatile, and difficult to control. There is a need for management, the organization, and the individual to assist with success factors. Much is dependent on the desire to change, the methods chosen, and consistent follow-through. However, if you do nothing, you will still have a morale issue. Take the time, seek remedies, and keep morale high. Doing so lowers attrition, improves productivity, increases profitability, and, most importantly, reduces stress.

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.