

COLUMN BY | SCOTT BLANCHARD & DAVID WITT

EMPLOYEES



◆ BEST PRACTICES IN EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

During an economic downturn, employees require more attention, not less. The well-known adage, “employees are a company’s most important asset,” becomes especially meaningful when a company is under pressure to perform. It’s during these times that organizations need their employees to be at their best. This can be challenging because economic uncertainty and the resulting fear cause performance to drop

even in the most productive of organizations. Because it’s natural for employees to worry and become preoccupied about job security when the future is unclear, managing employee energy effectively is crucial.

EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

Change, whether internal or external, is difficult for employees to handle. That’s why it is essential to acknowledge and address employees’ concerns upfront. If this doesn’t happen, employees will focus on personal issues instead of thinking about how they can pull together as a team to

help the organization move forward. In this environment, it is incumbent for leaders to closely monitor the degree to which employees are focused, productive and enthusiastic about their work.

Unfortunately, many employers assume employees who still have jobs during a recession will consider themselves lucky and work hard for that reason alone. However, recent research shows this isn't true.

According to a new study by Leadership IQ, 74 percent of employees who kept their jobs even amid a corporate layoff say their own productivity has declined, and 69 percent say the quality of their company's product or service has declined. This negative view of the workplace is not the sort of approach that inspires employees to devote themselves to providing the level of work required to get through the economic challenges that lie ahead.

There is always a market for employees with strong skills, so effective managers will focus on ways to retain their best employees, especially during economic downturns. Employers, too, will ensure their managers and executive teams understand how to provide a fulfilling, stimulating and growing work environment. If they don't, they may find a situation where the best people leave because of a demoralizing work environment and the remaining employees are only those without better offers at the moment. This is hardly a recipe for success.

PASSIONATE AND MOTIVATED

Employees need to be more productive and innovative. Yet, decreased resources, poor market conditions and extra work can make this difficult. How do you get the energy and commitment to meet these challenges?

Here are eight ways to create committed and passionate employees who will assist their companies through what lies ahead. Firms that meet the needs of employees in these critical areas can expect improved discretionary effort, long-term commitment to the organization and lower turnover.

1. Worthwhile work. Employees have a desire for their work to be more than just a job. They come to work for several reasons: to be paid, to earn money for their families to survive, to be contributing

SINCE THERE IS ALWAYS A MARKET FOR GOOD EMPLOYEES WITH STRONG SKILLS, EFFECTIVE MANAGERS WILL FOCUS ON WAYS TO RETAIN THEIR BEST EMPLOYEES, ESPECIALLY DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS.

members of their organization and society and to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Today's culture enables employees to feel that working is a strong virtue and a core human need. Once employees understand how their work contributes to their organizations' successes, they comprehend how their organizations benefit society as a whole and how their work can therefore make positive contributions to society. Organizations that take the time to connect each employee's individual work to the bigger picture reap long-term benefits from their employees.

2. Autonomy. This is the capacity to do a job without the need for help or unnecessary interference from managers. Employees greatly desire to have the tools, training, support and authority to make decisions and perform their jobs correctly. On the other hand, they don't perform well in situations where they lack autonomy, especially after they've gained the skills to work independently. Increasing autonomy aids in producing more satisfied employees.

3. Collaboration. Employees flourish in environments where interpersonal tension is low and cooperation and collaboration between employees and departments are high. Competitiveness, office

politics and dissent can create a fearful and less-than-collaborative environment for employees. Additionally, stress-based environments cause people to lose focus on their work and concentrate more on how to survive within the organization. Employees yearn for an organizational environment and culture that enhances collaboration, cooperation and encouragement.

4. Growth. In order to ensure job and career security, it is important for employees to continually update and expand their work experiences and job skills. Growth is not merely a fringe benefit, but rather a necessity for successful employment. Unfortunately, organizations don't always realize that for the younger generations the opportunity for growth is a nonnegotiable requirement. Generation Y employees seek advancement much earlier in their careers and are dissatisfied if they have to wait several years in the same position before they are allowed to move up within the organization. When growth is not present, or if it's unclear about how employees can grow and develop themselves to become marketable and employable, employees sense they are at dead ends and are more likely to seek employment elsewhere.

5. Fairness. The main reason employees leave organizations is not because of inadequate managers. The real reason is because there is a fundamental disconnect between employees' personal values and what's being asked of them at work or what's being done around them. Employees require a procedural fairness that allows them to understand how decisions are being made that affect them. They don't expect every decision to go their way but, at a minimum, employees want to understand the decision and the decision-making process. Also, employees need to sense there is some fairness in the way resources are allocated within the organization. When employees think fairness is out of balance, they reciprocate by doing no more than what they feel is fair in return.

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6. Recognition. Employees crave recognition for a job well-done, including being noticed and acknowledged when they do something well. Yet, what typically happens is nothing, or worse yet, the assignment of more work. When firms do not take the time to actively reward and recognize good performance, the passion for the job diminishes with every unrecognized accomplishment.

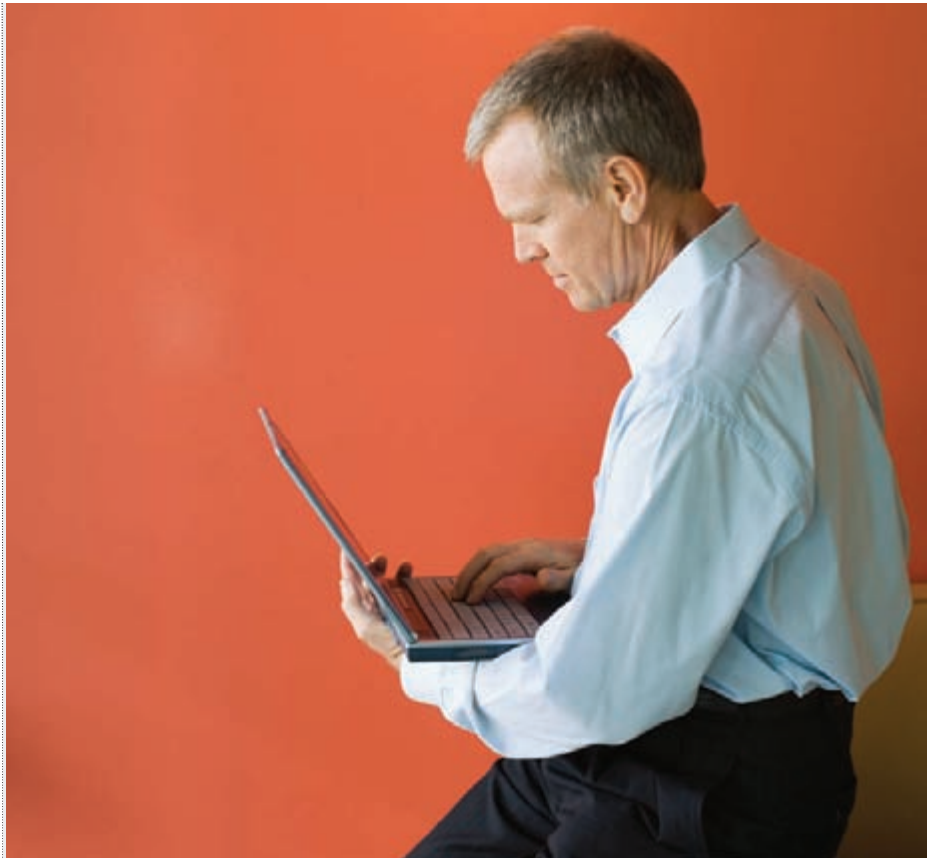
7. Connectedness with colleagues. Effective organizations do not allow highly competitive and destructive environments to occur among employees. This can be a challenge during uncertain economic times when fear, anxiety or discomfort can cause employees to lose focus on immediate work tasks and instead concentrate on protecting their personal interests and safety. In addition, when employees believe that they and their colleagues are working at cross-purposes, they lose connectedness and the entire organization suffers.

8. Connectedness with leadership. A positive relationship with a manager is another major contributor to employee passion. Similarly, a poor managerial relationship is a surefire way for employees to really lose their passion, interest and productivity in their roles.

In many ways, a manager is the lynchpin to success. However, there are still many managers who engage in harmful tactics such as using fear or coercion to motivate their employees. When this happens, organization productivity suffers substantially. That's why it is crucial for companies to train executives and managers to be relationship builders and employee developers.

START NOW!

The most effective companies are those that have an explicit and pervasive focus on understanding and managing employee passion. Rather than conducting random employee surveys, effective companies provide managers with ongoing feedback and also hold them accountable for creating a positive environment within their own departments.



This doesn't happen by chance. Rather, it's due to the implementation of a vision that results in a culture with clear values. Leaders set the direction and define the way to work together on this vision. Employees are expected to share the corporate values and focus on the right priorities. If this type of leadership is absent, performance suffers.

Peter Drucker, business author and the father of modern management, said, "The only things that happen naturally in an organization are friction, confusion and malperformance. Everything else is a result of leadership." Therefore, organizations that merely hope their employees will become more passionate about their work – but don't take active measures – will be disappointed, especially in this economy. Well-run companies expend twice the effort to create and maintain a healthy environment for their employees than do less successful companies. They acknowledge reality and, at the same time, implement strategies to

deal with the economy by working together. In other words, these organizations take care of their employees first.

Day after day, week after week, the best companies focus on understanding how to create and sustain a motivating environment for employees. They know this correlates strongly with overall organizational vitality and success. This orientation and commitment help protect companies against negative outcomes such as turnover, shrinkage, lack of productivity, interpersonal conflict and workplace injuries. By understanding the work force and applying the right motivation strategies, management has the tools to engage employees during both tough and prosperous economic times. **mt**

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