

How to manage in times like these

Retaining the right people has always been a crucial component of organisational success and getting it right is not easy. A difficult economic climate can make the task at once more essential and even harder.

Challenging market conditions expose weaknesses in your business, and people issues will have an ever increasing impact on company performance. Staff can very easily become demotivated and insecure. To succeed you need to manage better than ever before to maintain productivity and hold onto your top performers.

So, how do you do it...??

Maintain morale

When a business is under pressure a reaction by managers can be to say nothing and just keep going. Too often it is assumed that talking about it will cause more worry. On the contrary – talking reduces concern. People who are concerned but have little information will tend to make it up. And the story is always worse than reality.

As well as negative rumours, people tend to withdraw. They go into a 'sit and see' mode waiting for the axe to fall and letting things slip as they wait. Along with such behaviour the team leader may find that team members get into negative huddles and begin to bring each other down.

Motivate

As a manager you need to understand what motivates the people in your team: what makes them tick? Different people respond to different motivators. It's not all about money, people want security, recognition, opportunities for development or to feel valued and appreciated. Assessments can be used to quickly identify what will have the quickest maximum impact on the different people in your team. Motivation is about individuals, not team incentives. Each person must be managed in the most appropriate way which will help keep them on the inside and performing well.

Communication

Worried people crave information. If there's one thing we all hate it's being kept in the dark. Make sure you communicate regularly and effectively with your staff. This can be through weekly team meetings or even daily briefings if matters are moving fast. Email updates work well if you need to disseminate information to a lot of people quickly, or a telephone call. One to one interaction can really make people feel valued and wanted. Where you face problems try to involve them in forming solutions. If there are tough decisions to be made be honest. Employees whose opinions are valued, and who feel their idea can impact on company direction, will feel more aligned to company goals.

Development

Whilst sales might have slowed, people's need for learning and development opportunities won't have changed. In fact they may increase as markets tend to change quickly in adverse economic climates. Providing opportunities for growth, such as behavioural and personality assessments, 360 exercises and good feedback say to employees "We are still investing in you and the future". A good programme of personal development, balancing improved performance with self knowledge will really motivate and engage people.

Hard times can be like the management Olympics. How managers behave, communicate, motivate, mentor, development and praise staff will have a huge impact on morale and performance. Managers need to understand and build on their own skills and personal characteristics to face these challenges. Objective business assessments – be they behaviour, personality, 360 or emotional intelligence, provide the backbone of essential business practice. They are not simply nice to have luxuries they are a core part of your survival plan.