

Keeping Employee Morale Up During Tough Times.

By Melissa Martin, Director, The Clarity Group.

All the doom and gloom in the media surrounding the current financial crisis has seen organisations putting in place recruitment freezes, re-structuring, and even more recently announcing that they are cancelling Christmas parties. This creates many challenges for HR with a major one being the impact this negativity has on employee morale. We constantly read about the importance of retaining key talent given the skills shortage and the difficulty of finding good staff but how do we ensure that we keep our 'stars' when there is so much uncertainty in the market at the moment.

Granted, low employee morale can be brought about by many other factors including an absence of vision or understanding of the bigger picture of the organization; a lack of performance feedback; insufficient resources to be able to do one's job; no sense of social connection to others in the organization; or even a perception of unfairness between colleagues (ie she is being treated differently to me, he is being paid more etc). Regardless, there are many things that organisations can do during these tough times in order to work towards increasing employee morale.

Whilst a good place to start before implementing new strategies is to conduct an employee satisfaction survey to truly understand what is happening in your organisation, here are a few examples to get you started:

- Reward for your high performers. You don't need to necessarily reward them financially, think broader where possible. For example, would your employee look favourably upon use of a car park for a week, perhaps offer them an extra week's annual leave, the opportunity to leave work early to finish off their Christmas shopping, or even during the quiet time over Christmas an extra day or so off to spend with the family, friends, on holiday etc.
- Recognition of a job well done. An email to the team publically acknowledging the work they have done, or of a particular individual, will go a long way. Making an effort to walk up to your staff to say Thank You or even something as simple as giving them a thank you card has positive outcomes.
- Communicate. Call a meeting, organise a coffee, take them out to lunch. Either way, taking the time to speak to them about the future of the organisation, how the company is tracking, the security of their role and plans for the future. This will help them to see beyond the negativity in the market.
- Offer the opportunity of mentoring, skill development or career development. Show that you are committed to assisting them develop their skill base and career. This investment in their future will assist in their loyalty to your organisation and help them feel valued. Using the quieter times to develop skills also has positive effects in that when the economy strengthens again, you staff will be up-skilled and in a stronger position than before.

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