



Managing People

Managing staff requires an employer to be more than just 'the boss' in the workplace. You effectively take on the role of counsellor, guide, leader, taskmaster, coach and mentor to your employees.

A key challenge for employers is to keep staff motivated and performing well in the workplace.

Motivation

Keeping your staff motivated

What motivates employees to keep performing and to stay with their employer?

Contrary to popular perception, motivating employees doesn't always have to involve financial rewards.

Countless studies have shown that employees often rank recognition and open communication well above all else when choosing a job or staying with their current jobs.

There isn't a single approach to motivating staff. You may need to identify a range of motivational drivers for your workplace. Focus on different strategies to tap into the different needs of your staff. One size may not fit all.

How do I motivate my employees?

Your greatest challenge is to work with your staff to align their individual needs, interests, career aspirations and learning goals with your business needs of high performance and results.

What sort of methods should I consider?

Adopt strategies to retain, reward and recognise your employees who make a positive contribution to overall business performance, such as:

- **Opportunity for advancement**
Provide new roles, stimulating work and other opportunities for individual growth.
- **Challenging and interesting work**
Provide growth opportunities for staff with challenging assignments and the necessary tools to successfully complete projects.
- **Job security**
Provide a safe, stable work environment and additional benefits. Employees may stay with a business despite below-market pay, but not below award!
- **Showing respect**
Respect your employees' efforts and show them how they add value to the business. Cross-train staff and encourage them to work more closely with customers to help them feel more valued.
- **Employee recognition**
Acknowledge your employees' efforts by taking the time to personally thank them for doing something well. Specifically say how and why their effort was of value.

Employee recognition is a powerful tool for shaping and reinforcing desired performance with the advantage of helping both you and your employees feel better in the process.

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STEP 1

Find out what motivates your staff

Consider:

- what interests them?
- what are they looking for in the job?
- what are their career aspirations, development and individual learning needs?
- are they looking for cash incentives or non-financial incentives, such as flexible working hours, time off for personal or family responsibilities or greater decision-making responsibilities?

STEP 2

Work out how staff needs fit with your business needs

Consider:

- the ability of your business to pay cash incentives and how these could be organised
- the nature and operation of your business, for example, could you introduce non-financial incentives, such as flexible hours or rostered days off
- the impact of introducing workplace flexibility in your business.

Staff may value opportunities for professional development, flexibility or personal independence over monetary bonuses.

While such non-material incentives may cost less than a raise, they will probably require a greater investment in terms of time and energy from you. However, the benefits are substantial. Your staff will value the fact that you recognise their needs and satisfactorily reward their efforts. In turn, you can significantly increase profitability by retaining experienced, motivated and productive staff.

STEP 3

Review your proposed arrangements/incentives with your staff

Discuss:

- options being considered

- how they will work for the business
- potential impact on the business and staff.

Ensure your staff are happy with your proposed arrangements/incentives.

STEP 4

Implementation

Once a proposal has been agreed you may wish to introduce changes for a trial period.

You may also wish to draw up a workplace policy so that it is clear who the proposal applies to, when it applies and how it is applied.

STEP 5

Review and evaluate

Set a time for the trial period and review the arrangement within that time frame.

Managing absenteeism

Absenteeism represents a major cost for businesses. Unplanned absences can cost businesses in:

- paying the employee wage/salary and/or benefits while not producing
- juggling other employees to cover the work of the absent employee
- overtime for those covering the work of the absent employee
- casual labour to replace the absent employee
- production losses and inefficient material use.

Four causes of absenteeism

Common causes of absenteeism include:

- work/life issues
- stress
- entitlement mentality
- personal needs and family issues.

Strategies to reduce absenteeism

There are many strategies that you can initiate that will help you to reduce absenteeism in your business:

- promote a high performance work culture which emphasises why and how your staff fit into the culture
- provide flexible work practices which enable employees to take planned days off

- work with staff to develop strategies to address unplanned absences
- redesign, eliminate or reduce 'boring' or repetitive jobs
- widen job responsibilities and increase promotional opportunities
- recognise and reward your employees' contribution to your business
- improve the skills of supervisors
- provide training and development opportunities
- implement preventative occupational health and safety strategies to minimise workers compensation absences
- monitor annual and long service leave data to ensure your employees are taking adequate recreational breaks.

Other strategies

Look at the culture of the workplace and find out why staff may not want to go to work.

Measure sick leave and unauthorised absences rather than all absences due to other leave.

If you're introducing systems to reward staff for not taking sick leave, ensure fairness and equity for those staff who are genuinely sick or with carers' responsibilities.

Reward systems must not undermine sick leave provisions in the relevant award.

Care should be taken when introducing reward systems. While these systems may reduce the levels of absenteeism and sick leave, it may also encourage staff to be at work when they are sick. The outcome may cost the business in further productivity losses as illness is spread throughout the workplace.

Read the *Employment Essentials* card on *Introducing Workplace Flexibility* to see how flexible work practices can help improve employee performance.

Grievance handling

To solve problems as they develop, you need effective grievance handling procedures tailored to the needs of your workplace.

What is a grievance ?

A grievance is a formal expression of dissatisfaction about a work situation usually by an individual employee, but it may sometimes also be initiated by a group of staff or a union acting on their behalf.

Grievance procedures are based on the principle of natural justice and it is recognised as good business sense to have effective grievance procedures.

Handling a grievance

Deal with the grievance promptly

Avoiding the matter creates anxiety. Initiate discussion quickly, investigate and double check all the facts.

Be accessible

Make sure staff understand the grievance procedure and how it works.

Informality

Discuss the issue in a non-threatening environment. No-one should receive a printed form letter in response to a problem.

Remember, when such a letter is perceived as 'legal', your employee may feel they need 'legal' assistance.

Be consistent

Policies and procedures must apply equally to all staff.

Admit errors

If you have acted incorrectly or inappropriately – say so! Then fix the problem.

Closure

Decide your response/action and give a full explanation. This allows the matter to be finalised.

Learn from it

Resolving the grievance should give you practical insight into dealing with such situations (and possibly others) in the future.

Sample grievance procedure

The procedure can cover both individual and collective grievances.

The aim is to resolve problems that arise as close to the source as possible with graduated steps for further discussions and resolution at higher levels of authority as necessary.

A procedure could include the following steps:

1. Employee notifies the employer verbally or in writing of the grievance, and requests a meeting to seek a solution.
Discussion is held between the employee (and representative) and a supervisor in the first instance.
2. If the matter is not resolved then the employee (and representative) confers with the manager.
3. If the matter is still not resolved then a joint meeting is held with the employer or more senior management representative.

Conflict in the workplace

Conflict may arise from time to time which may have significant adverse effects on your business. This may include loss of productivity and customer confidence.

Conflict occurs for a range of reasons. It may be the result of personal differences, differences in approach, an action at work, or even outside the workplace. Ignoring the problem may potentially lead to something more serious, such as a physical conflict between staff or significant impacts on work performance.

People

Checklist

- Deal with conflict as soon as it comes to your attention, either through observation or a complaint from staff.
- Begin by gathering information about the conflict. Talk to staff involved to identify the issue. Investigate the matter by talking to witnesses.
- Ensure you meet all legal obligations to provide a safe workplace free from harassment and discrimination.
- Meet with the staff involved to identify outcomes. Devise a plan of action to manage and/or resolve the issue.
- Take disciplinary action where necessary. Ensure staff clearly understand:
 - their obligations and responsibilities in the workplace
 - behaviours which are acceptable and unacceptable in the workplace
 - the consequences of continuing to display unacceptable behaviour(s).
- Discuss other issues that may arise.
- Monitor the situation and deal with issues as they arise.

Note:

Simply separating the staff involved may not be the answer as you may just be transferring a problem to another area.

Introducing change at work

Change comes in many forms, from a simple roster change to the way people work, such as the introduction of new systems and procedures. How the change is introduced into the workplace is important. The difference between a smooth transition or one filled with opposition and challenge can often be a simple process of consultation and communication.

Checklist

- Clearly identify what you propose to change.
- Involve staff by discussing the proposed change(s) with them. Explain the reason for the change(s) and seek their input and suggestions before making your decision.
- Draft the proposed change(s) in writing and give staff the opportunity to comment and suggest changes.
- Develop a timetable for introducing the change(s), allowing for a period of transition, and training where necessary.
- Explain to staff what is expected of them as a result of the new policy/procedure/system.
- Monitor and review the progress and impact of the change(s). Get feedback from staff about how the change is affecting them. Amend the policy/procedure/system where necessary.

Other titles in the Employment Essentials series

- Introducing Workplace Flexibility
- Managing Performance
- Ending Employment
- Workplace Policies and Procedures

Need more information on the topics covered in the Employment Essentials series?

Contact NSW Industrial Relations Employer Education Services.

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