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Article

Improving Employee Productivity

This guide discusses employee productivity improvement. It is conceivable for you to have more employees than the competition yet your company produces less and for you to have disgruntled, low-output employees even though you pay your employees more than the competition pays theirs. Productivity surveys and case studies indicate that increased worker motivation and satisfaction can increase worker output. Progressive, innovative managers now achieve productivity gains with human resource management techniques that go beyond pay incentives.

This guide discusses how to increase worker output by motivating with quality of work life concepts and by tailoring benefits to meet the needs of employees. Cost: enlightened human resource management probably costs no more than employee turnover (hiring and training new employees), unwarranted pay increases, and low productivity. Benefit: better productivity; loyal, efficient workers; higher quality work, and increased likelihood of staying in business.

The essence of employee motivation and effectiveness is the manner in which they are managed. A direct relationship exists between effective management (i.e., providing a work environment that simultaneously achieves company goals and employees' goals) and modern human resource management.

Your management success is judged by your skill and knowledge in recognizing and assessing issues that concern employees and by your ability to resolve these concerns with employee help and satisfaction.

- Do your employees know how you judge and measure their performance?
- Do you provide and encourage individual development with training and educational programs?
- Do you trust your employees and rely upon their knowledge?
- Do you let employees make decisions?
- Do you have timely, accurate, open two-way communication with your employees?

If you answer no to all of these questions, you probably are an unsatisfactory human resource manager and have (or will have) employee-productivity problems.

Quality of Work Life

Getting high quality job performance from your employees depends on giving employees opportunities for their personal growth, achievement, responsibility, recognition, and reward.

Pay - money - is the primary need and reward. Once the compensation (pay and benefits) is established properly, it is necessary to use other means to further motivate and improve your work force's output. The basis of all job enhancement efforts is your recognition of employees' desire to do good work, to assume responsibility, to achieve and to succeed.

Changes to consider in creating a new quality of work life atmosphere include:

FROM:	TO:
Detailed job descriptions with specific tasks and rigid instruction for how to do the work	Flexible, diverse work assignment allowing self-regulation, variety and challenge
Structured chain of command, managers making decisions and supervisors bossing	Involvement in planning, decision making and operating procedure
Hierarchical channels of communications	Direct, fast two-way communication
Limited on-the-job instruction	Advanced training, educational and career development opportunities
Job specialization in one task	Leeway allowed for every employee to complete many task by crossing lines of specialization
Obscure, irregular job evaluations	Objective job performance standards with measures fairly administered
Careless or neglected safety and health conditions	Clean, safe and healthful working conditions

The quality of work life technique is to involve your employees by sharing the management responsibility and authority with them - the workers who do the job.

Flexible Benefits

Compensation costs - salaries, wages, and benefits - are a large and increasing part of operating expenses; yet, productivity can decline among workers who get more pay and benefits. Workers are productive with fair pay tied to performance. Ironically, not all employee motivation and productivity problems are solved by pay raises and promotions.

The tailoring of benefits to satisfy specific needs is part of the quality of work life technique. It is a way to maximize the amount of labor costs going to the employee and to maximize your return on these costs without increasing across-the-board expenses. By making a special effort to satisfy individual employee needs, you reinforce the motivational value of the flexible benefit.

For example, you can reduce unwanted employee turnover and related recruiting, hiring, and training costs by shifting these costs from developing new employees to keeping experienced employees. You can motivate an employee to increase productivity by providing opportunities for career development (training or schooling).

At the same time you have improved the worker's skills and shown recognition of the worker's value and aspiration. A tailored benefit can be worth as much to an employee as a pay raise. Such a benefit is practical because (1) it probably costs no more than worker unrest and diminished productivity and (2) it is probably less costly than a comparable pay increase.

Age, education, job experience, job fulfillment, marital status, and family size are considerations that determine the utility and attractiveness of a benefit. Different benefits appeal to different people. Everyone's needs are different. A younger employee might be motivated by having use of a company car. An older person may want more status like a title or a professional association membership. The list of possible employees benefits and their applications is nearly unlimited. To get the maximum value, you've got to tailor the benefit to the job and your business requirements and financial capability.

Think how you could use:

- pre-tax thrift-savings programs
- recreational programs
- discounts
- scholarships
- personal financial planning
- loans
- tuition refund
- profit sharing
- company car
- personal expense account
- parking privileges
- legal assistance
- extra vacation
- child care
- job titles
- professional or trade association memberships
- travel

A flexible benefit is two-fold. Not only does the benefit satisfy some employee's specific need but it also communicates your concern to meet these needs, creating the kind of work environment that contributes to increased employee productivity.

You must recognize the productivity problem and the needs of your employees so that you can tailor the benefit to meet the situation. Beyond pay and statutory benefits that provide the most value to your business.

Changing the Change

For many, if not most, company's adoption of quality of work life and flexible benefits management techniques can dramatically change how things are done. It is difficult and risky to make these changes; however, such changes may be not only necessary but also the difference between companies that are competitive and companies that aren't. Experience shows that with proper consultation, planning, training, and implementation the innovative human resource management concept is becoming the standard for effective management.

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