

Don't let a slow economy derail your efforts to make your employees feel special. What's needed now is the personal touch. Fostering positive relationships among colleagues and between managers and employees is the best morale and productivity booster around. Best of all, you can create that nurturing family feeling in the workplace without spending a lot of money.

You've seen the light. You know your employees are the key to your success. You typically reward them with raises and bonuses. But you may not be feeling flush these days. Luckily, when it comes to motivating workers, money is just one option. In fact, plenty of experts say there are other motivating factors which are free or low cost. Don't let an unhealthy economy derail your efforts to make your employees feel valued and important.

Here's why it matters: Employees who are engaged are more productive and innovative. They work harder and treat customers like friends; their efforts are directly tied to your bottom line. Try these three low-budget strategies to keep your workforce happy at home.

Getting to Know You

Each of your employees has professional goals and interests. Your job is to learn what they are and how they can be utilized to create a stronger company. If you can, align your employees' passions and talents with your business goals, the results can be extraordinary. So take the time to find out about their aspirations and how they feel they can best contribute. The more you know what makes them tick, the more likely you are to be able to meet their needs.

Perhaps one person craves training so she can move up. Another would really love to expand his department. By taking their desires into account, you're communicating to your employees that they are respected and valued - and what could be more motivating than that?

A Little Recognition Goes a Long Way

Whether it's a simple thank you, a heartfelt "great job" or a complimentary letter in a personnel file, recognition is a powerful motivator. Most employees have reasonable expectations when it comes to praise. But there will be times when people work around the clock to get something done, or find an ingenious solution to a longstanding, reoccurring problem.

Whatever you do, don't let the moment pass. Take them to lunch or give them a day off to make up for the extra hours they've been working. A written acknowledgement is particularly powerful. Not only is it a great addition to a personnel file, it can be shared with spouses, parents and friends. Praise is cheap, easy and effective. It boosts self-esteem and inspires people to even greater accomplishments.

From Parties to Philanthropy: The Power of Group Activities

Even the best job and the most dynamic workplace can be dull at times. You can spice it up through various group activities and celebrations. The possibilities are virtually endless and the benefits are clear. Sharing good times enhances team spirit, boosts morale and helps create a family atmosphere. People who like one another work better together are more productive and have more fun.

Boredom and isolation are the two killers of workplace motivation. Fight them with a softball team, a baby shower or a charitable project such as a food drive, mentoring program or fundraiser. The investment is modest and the payoff can be substantial.

What do all these things have in common? They encourage the important but often undervalued interaction between bosses and employees and among colleagues. When it comes to showing the love and creating strong bonds, the sky's the limit - even if your budget is grounded in the reality of today's economy.

