

10 Keys to Keeping Morale Up During Times of Difficulty and Change

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1. Let employees express their feelings about the difficulties and changes that are going on.

If you try to curtail this and tell them they need to “move on” (get over it), these feelings will only fester and turn into anger and resentment or result in employees becoming disengaged.

2. Don't focus all of your efforts on getting buy-in to the changes you seek.

Remember “Seek First to Understand.” People need to know you understand their perspective and their feelings before they will listen to your exhortations.

3. Support constructive criticism.

Make it safe for employees to express dissent or criticism without being labeled as not being a “team player.” If you don't, you will miss out on important information and will create a workforce that learns not to care.

4. Give employees as much opportunity as possible to solve problems and take constructive action.

Taking constructive action is perhaps the strongest antidote to fear and the feeling of helplessness. Engaging employees in constructive action plays a central role in keeping morale up in times of uncertainty and difficulty.

5. To facilitate employees' taking constructive action and feeling like winners during difficult times, establish and communicate clear short-term goals and objectives.

Not only does it build confidence and a sense of purpose, it also channels employees' attention in a useful direction, rather than on feeling sorry for themselves and scared.

6. Amp up your communication.

Make sure employees know what is going on each step of the way. When people are feeling vulnerable, their tolerance for ambiguity decreases dramatically. To feel safe and secure, they need to know as much as possible about what is going on. To improve your communication, get employee input about what information and what forms of communication would be most useful.

- 7. When you talk about your vision and the challenges you are facing, use as many stories and analogies as possible, rather than PowerPoint slides filled with statistics and facts.**

Great leaders are masters at inspiring people through compelling stories and analogies.

- 8. Make sure you are “wired into the voice of your internal customers” through Employee Advisory Groups, president’s breakfasts, team meetings, focus groups, etc.**

During times of uncertainty, this is of paramount importance. By having a vehicle for ongoing conversations with employees, you get valuable “customer feedback” that allows you to come up with the most effective strategies for executing and communicating changes.

Getting employee feedback also helps you avoid making huge morale damaging blunders. Soliciting input and engaging employees in ongoing conversation, also communicates respect – a significant factor in employee morale and keeps employees engaged. Keeping employees engaged not only increases buy-in, it also enables employees to take constructive action and prevents them from feeling helpless and then demoralized.

- 9. When asking for employee input and ideas, clearly define the parameters of employee input and involvement.**

If you don’t, employees will feel “set up” if their input is not used. Also, make sure you keep employees apprised of the status of their ideas and requests, as well as the final outcome.

- 10. Celebrate victories and examples of excellence both formally and informally.**

During times of difficulty, it is especially important for employees to feel like winners.