

Personal Enrichment

How to Create a Positive Work Environment

Positive versus Negative Workplaces

We have all worked in places where we grew to dread getting up in the morning, and a few of us have had the pleasure of working for a boss who makes us feel like we can do anything. Let's take a look at the differences between a positive and a negative work environment.

Signs of a Negative Work Environment

- The boss is unfriendly.
- The boss is critical.
- There is high employee turnover.
- There is low employee morale.
- People watch the clock.
- People don't get much performance feedback.

Signs of a Positive Work Environment

- The boss demonstrates interest in the employees.
- The boss has an encouraging attitude.
- Employees like working there.
- There is evidence of company pride and loyalty.
- People know where they stand with their supervisors.

Thousands of books have been written on the subject of managing and motivating people, and as many training seminars are conducted on this subject around the world every day. And yet it's interesting that even with all of this available information, few companies succeed at creating a positive work environment. Let's see what's involved.

Four Key Skills

Creating a positive work environment is based on four key skills. They are:

1. Tell people what you expect of them.
2. Show interest in your team members.
3. Create an encouraging environment.
4. Recognize and reward good performance.

Skill #1: State Your Expectations

Telling people what you expect of them means doing the following:

- Communicating expectations clearly
- Having a specific job description
- Identifying specific performance standards
- Specifying deadlines
- Setting goals

Skill #2: Show Interest in Your Team

What behaviors convey that someone is interested in you?

- Making eye contact
- Calling you by name
- Asking your opinion
- Smiling
- Complimenting your work
- Taking your suggestions

These behaviors convey a *lack* of interest:

- Ignoring you
- Not knowing your name or not using it
- Not asking your opinion
- Ignoring your suggestions
- Not commenting on your work
- Following your suggestion, but only when heard from someone else

Such signs *discourage* productivity because they make people feel discouraged, angry, less confident, and stripped of self-esteem.

Skill #3: Create an Encouraging Environment

Most people would agree that an encouraging work environment is one where:

- Your ideas are valued.
- Creativity is encouraged.
- Risks are encouraged.
- Fun and laughter are valued.
- New ideas are rewarded.
- You feel appreciated.
- People thank you for your contributions.
- Flexibility is valued.
- You feel like part of the team.

Creating such an environment results in the following benefits to employees. You:

- Contribute more ideas.
- Feel more committed.
- Look forward to coming to work.
- Are more productive.
- Have increased self-esteem.

Creating such an environment results in the following benefits to managers and business owners:

- Less turnover
- Less sabotage
- Greater loyalty
- Easier to find employees due to good reputation
- Higher productivity

Skill #4: Recognize and Reward Good Performance

A reinforcer is anything that happens, after a behavior, that tends to increase the chances that the behavior will be repeated. Included are such things as:

- Compliments
- Smiles
- Thumbs-up gesture
- Saying "Thank you"
- Public announcement of your achievement
- Positive letter in your personnel file
- Promotion
- Time off
- Special parking space
- First choice on schedule
- Dinner with the boss
- Tickets to an event
- Extra employee discount
- Picture on the bulletin board
- Applause at a meeting

Recognition Guidelines

1. *Describe the results you are recognizing. Be specific.* It's important to make certain the employee knows what behavior or accomplishment you are referring to.
2. *State your personal appreciation.* Say, "I appreciate it." Adding your personal appreciation makes the compliment feel more genuine.
3. *Encourage the person to continue producing such good work.* This increases the chances that the person will repeat the desirable behavior.

Suggested Reading

Bob Nelson, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*. New York, NY:Workman Publishing Company, 1994.

Call (972) 788-9201 for your free half-hour phone consultation.