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Advanced Communication Skills that Improve Employee Motivation
February 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

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Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations
May 4th, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

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Maintaining Effective Communication Channels
August 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5196350630268998915>

Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders
November 2nd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8703449675246617347>

Helping Millennials Manage in a COVID-19 World

Millennials make up 35 percent of the global workforce, making them the largest segment in today's workplace. Born between 1980 and 1996, they are often referred to as the "burnout" generation, as they report higher levels of anxiety and depression than their predecessors.¹ There are many theories as to why millennials are so stressed out, including high student loan debt; the rising cost of living; the challenging job market; perfectionist tendencies; overexposure to social media; and the postponement of key milestones, like purchasing a home, getting married, and starting a family.²

If millennials were struggling before 2020, how did they handle the unexpected workplace transition, social isolation, and surging unemployment associated with global lockdowns, not to mention the widespread fear of illness and death caused by COVID-19 itself?

Tonia Lee and Sonya Markova, who both work in Workplace Options' London service center, say their office received an increase in requests in April and May for employee-wellbeing support in hard-hit industries, like retail, arts and entertainment, and hospitality, which rely heavily on millennial workers. Unlike other businesses where employees may have an option to work remotely, most workers in these settings stopped working all together. According to Lee, many employees went from buzzing social environments to complete social isolation in 48 hours or less.

Markova adds that millennials have reportedly struggled with emotional distress, low mood, disrupted sleep, and a lack of motivation due to stress associated with COVID-19. This can often translate into lower productivity and creativity. If left unchecked, the symptoms can potentially lead to anxiety issues and even depression.

A poll of U.S. workers commissioned by Workplace Options revealed that younger workers (those between the ages of 18 and 29 years old) were more concerned than other generations, including those age 65 and older, about the return of COVID-19 later in the year.³

Account manager, Niema Cole, who is a millennial, adds that many friends and coworkers her age felt hopeless during the lockdown and were very worried about the wellbeing of family members. Additionally, several shared that they experienced difficulty concentrating while working from home.

How Employers Can Help

Managers are encouraged to reach out to millennial team members on a weekly basis to check on their wellbeing. Rather than simply asking, "How are you?", more specific questions, like those below, are recommended:

- What is your daily routine for work?
- What steps are you taking to shut off from work?
- Are you allowing time for breaks?
- Are you getting exercise?
- What are you doing to cope with the current situation?
- Is there anything we can support you with?

In addition, there are a number of ways managers can encourage social interaction and positive wellbeing for millennial staff members, including the following:

- Ask employees to share the positive takeaways that are surfacing for the team and company.
- Suggest taking breaks from the news and social media.
- Challenge employees to try something new (e.g. virtual yoga, online photography class, a new recipe), then report back to the team whether they would recommend it to others.
- Harness millennials' enthusiasm for social causes by creating volunteer opportunities for the team—like delivering meals, providing check-in telephone calls to seniors, fostering pets, and so forth.¹

- Keep employees informed of work-related changes.
- Remind employees of any employer-sponsored resources that are available, including telephonic or virtual counseling and online, wellbeing classes.

As companies reopen, managers should give special thought to how to best help millennials adjust to the new normal, which will be anything but normal, as continued flux is anticipated. There are a number of steps managers can take to help their employees transition back to work:

- Maintain local government, safety standards in the office. Depending on the country, this may include providing masks, hand sanitizer, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed.
- Allow for a gradual transition back to the work setting.
- Continue to promote self-care and check in with employees regarding their wellbeing. Educate employees on any employer-sponsored financial, emotional, and physical wellbeing resources.
- Help build morale and reconnect staff by planning workplace social events.
- Seek to understand how team members weathered the lockdown and how it is impacting their work.

On a positive note, studies show that millennials have embraced emotional wellbeing more than previous generations and are taking the lead in challenging mental health stigma.⁴ While they may struggle more than other employees, they are also more likely to take advantage of support when offered. The return-to-work transition is an excellent time for employers to provide millennials, and workers of all ages, with access to resources designed to address stress, anxiety, and burnout, as well as build resilience.

References

1. Economy, P. (2020). A new study of 150,000 millennials reveals they have 10 surprising things in common. Retrieved August 20, 2020, from <https://www.inc.com>
2. Court, E. (2016, October 19). These therapists specialize in the unique mental problems of millennials. Retrieved August 20, 2020, from <https://www.marketwatch.com>
3. Workplace Options. (2020, June 18). National poll finds employees concerned over return of COVID-19. Raleigh: Author. Retrieved August 20, 2020, from <https://www.workplaceoptions.com>
4. Hoffower, H. (2019, October 7). 50% of millennials have left a job for mental-health reasons, a new study found — and it speaks to some of the biggest problems plaguing the entire generation. Retrieved August 20, 2020, from <https://www.businessinsider.com>

Source: Workplace Options. (2020, August). Helping millennials manage in a COVID-19 world. Raleigh, NC: Author. Retrieved August 20, 2020, from <https://www.workplaceoptions.com>

Praising Employees

Basics

You work hard and then submit an excellent report, but all your boss says is, “I got it.”

No one likes a boss who takes him for granted. Even a good salary doesn't make up for a total lack of appreciation or praise. And hollow praise can be worse than no praise. Managers who effectively motivate people with praise know the difference between sweet talk and demonstrating honest appreciation.

Effective praise tells employees what they're doing right and encourages them to keep doing it. That's why some consider praise superior to punishment as a teaching tool. Praise is loaded with information: It tells you exactly what to do next time. Punishment has a lot less information: It only tells you what not to do.

Keys to Effective Praising

- Praise should be timely.
- Praise with precision. Be specific about the behavior you're praising. Go beyond, “Great job!” This shows you know what you're talking about and makes your praise credible.
- Communicate the importance of the employee's performance to the organization and its effect on you personally.
- Make eye contact. Smile. Shake hands.
- Don't overdo it. Phony praise is easy to spot and your employees will resent it.

Praise comes in several shades, ranging from recognizing a solid performance to commending an extraordinary job. Use it appropriately. Don't lavish praise on someone who efficiently performs a routine assignment, but don't fail to recognize her either. Don't substitute flowery words for other forms of reward for a truly exceptional performance. Above all, mean it when you praise someone.

Make sure everyone gets credit in a team effort. Few things are worse than a manager who ignores an assignment until his team succeeds, then takes all the credit. Always stress the contributions of each member of the team.

The ability to credit others for their efforts is widely recognized as a trait of a top manager. Don't be afraid that your supervisors won't appreciate you if you tell them what a great job your employees have done. The ability to enable others to get the job done is what makes a great manager.

Key Tips

Key Tip 1

Be generous with praise, but only when it's sincere. False praise is repulsive. So say enough about what the employee did to show that you really understand—and say it convincingly.

Key Tip 2

Don't forget to recognize people who do satisfactory jobs. Anyone who carries out the responsibilities delegated to them contributes to your success. Recognize good work even if it involves routine tasks.

Key Tip 3

Employees' responses to praise will vary, based on their past experiences and perceptions of you. Although you should follow our guidelines, understand that each time you use praise you're conducting an experiment of sorts. Use the results to pick those approaches that are most effective, and change your style if it's not working.

Specifics

Benefits of Praising

Here are some of the benefits of praising your employees effectively:

- Increased enthusiasm
- Improved communication
- Less wasted time and material
- Decreased turnover
- Increased quality
- Improved morale
- Increased loyalty
- Less conflict

Possible Risks of Praising

Some experts point out the negatives of praising, saying that it has limited value in many instances:

- Praise implies an evaluation, creating unintended stress for the person who's praised.
- Praise emphasizes the difference in status between the supervisor and the employee (I can evaluate you, but you can't evaluate me).
- Praise is often a prelude to criticism, because some use it to sugarcoat criticism in a so-called praise sandwich (praise, blame, praise).
- Praise might hurt employees' motivation to perform if they become dependent on it.

Effective Praise

Many of the risks of using praise can be countered by a simple strategy: Mean what you say.

- Respect for an employee should be the foundation for any praise. This includes soliciting employee input for recognition programs.
- Be honest and sincere. Don't manipulate employees and their feelings.
- Separate praise from reprimands and criticism, so it doesn't seem like sugarcoating.
- Praising should be used in conjunction with empathetic listening, involvement in the work, and attention to the concerns of the employee. It should open dialogue that leads to improvement.
- Supervisors should consider giving employees opportunities to give feedback on the supervisor's performance as a matter of equity.
- Be cautious when praise could be interpreted as turning up the pressure, such as during projects with tight deadlines.
- Unless you can alter your recipe to make it palatable, don't persist in praising people who don't like it.

Recognizing the Little Things

It's easy to overlook the value in recognizing people for simply doing their jobs well. Don't take these people for granted:

Employees who are on time

- Employees who are friendly to customers
- Employees who improve their quality of work (fewer errors)
- Employees who improve their quantity of work (more productive)

Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2018). Praising employees. Raleigh, NC: Author.

Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

Q. This year has been difficult for many employees. None of us has gotten sick with COVID-19, but I have noticed lower levels of excitement among workers about their jobs and less engagement, meaning they aren't as passionate, innovative, and initiating as they used to be. Is the pandemic to blame?

A. Research recently shared by the American Psychological Association shows that the coronavirus pandemic has played a significant role in reducing employee engagement as you describe it. This is particularly true as it pertains to dying from the disease. Most employees may not voice this fear. Not all employees respond equally or manage this stress in the same way. Research shows that supervisors can play a pivotal role in helping employees cope and stay engaged when they perform as “servant leaders.” When you behave as a servant leader, you will be perceived by your employees as a good listener, a supervisor who shows empathy and awareness, and is persuasive and committed to everyone’s growth, while placing a priority on “everyone coming together,” pulling through this together as a family or community. Employees who said they had supervisors matching these traits remained more engaged. Source: www.psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2020-75403-001.html

Q. What is the definition of reasonable suspicion? How do I know if what I am calling reasonable suspicion will later be upheld by any review or investigation of my role?

A. Reasonable suspicion is not a hunch and is not pure evidence of probable cause. It is, however, a recognized legal standard of proof and is generally found in all drug-free workplace policies that include a component for referral for drug testing. Reasonable suspicion is always based on specific and articulable (can be clearly expressed in communication) facts. More precisely, reasonable suspicion must be based on specific, contemporaneous, articulable observations concerning the appearance, behavior, speech, or body odors of the employee. With the supervisor’s documentation, rational inferences are drawn from those facts. Although not necessary, it is always a good idea to consider a checklist so all that can be documented is documented. By using a checklist that allows you to consider items you may have overlooked, your documentation is likely to be viewed more favorably if it is ever questioned because it possesses a preponderance of evidence, not just an item or two.

Q. I want to praise my employees more. I know how valuable it is, but I hesitate because I feel it won't be taken as genuine and that the employee will think I am being patronizing or insincere. Is there a way I can get over this hump?

A. Done correctly, praising employees is an act of giving, and it requires being genuine and vulnerable in front of your employee. This can make you fear rejection, especially if your own beliefs about praise cause you to hesitate in accepting praise from others. Rather than analyzing the whys and wherefores of this problem, use a behavioral change process and measure your progress. Keep a small diary and record 1) Opportunities you spot to offer praise; 2) Sensations of hesitation you experience when you offer it; 3) How you feel afterward, once you’ve offered the praise; and 4) What you believe is the positive impact of praising the employee. When praising an employee, describe what was done well, why the action was effective, and how it advances the mission of the work unit. This process will give you stronger reasons to value praise and offer it more often. According to the Harvard Business Review, most employees rate supervisors as more effective if they offer praise. Learn more: hbr.org/2017/05/why-do-so-many-managers-avoid-giving-praise

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