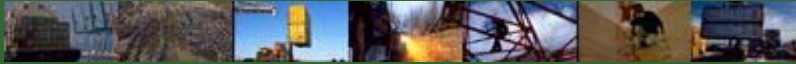




Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



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BOOSTING YOUR CREW'S MORALE

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

Webster defines *morale* as a “**strong sense of enthusiasm and dedication to a commonly shared goal that unifies a group.**” So, morale seems to involve the mood of a group, as a whole. We hear comments like, “Morale was high – we got a lot done and everyone felt good about it!”, or “Morale was low – we were discouraged and lacked confidence in how things were going.” The morale of a sports team, for example, or any action group, greatly depends upon whether or not the group is reaching its goals. But good morale also requires that people within the group each feel valued, and that quality leadership is provided.



Is the Morale of Your Work Team High?

How would you rate the morale of your work group? Do you hear laughter very often? And if so, are people laughing in fun, “with” each other, or “at” someone? Does energy and enthusiasm of the team seem to be high, or do workers dawdle as much as they can? Do crew members seem to have a sense of loyalty toward fellow workers and the company or do you hear constant grumbling and complaining? Do they “watch out for each other?” These are only indicators, of course, since morale is not easy to measure. And it’s certainly not the only thing you have to be concerned about, as a supervisor. But stop to look at the morale of your work group, as well as their productivity. Research by industrial psychologists has shown that low morale among employees can have a very negative effect upon both safety and productivity.

Employee Morale and Productivity

Employees who are dissatisfied with their work environment or the way a supervisor has treated them, tend to work less efficiently and less carefully, as a result both production and quality control drops. Good workers who are unhappy with the company may also leave and join a competitor, meaning additional hiring and training costs. On the other hand, when employee morale is high, loyalty to the company also tends to be high. In this environment, turnover is low and workers produce as well as they can. In addition, studies have shown that when employees perceived their company as supportive, and themselves an important part of the company’s success, a lower injury rate was experienced. Higher injury rates were reported from companies with low morale.

Employee Morale and Safety

An unsafe work environment can lower morale when employees feel tense or fearful about workplace safety. If a safety program is weak and hazards are not consistently controlled by management, the message sent to employees is, “preventing employee injury or death is not one of our highest values.” Industrial psychologists also find that employees with low morale have a more negative attitude toward their firm and its safety rules, which leads to less compliance with these rules and consequently more risk taking. The obvious potential is more frequent and severe injuries.

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What Affects the Morale of a Team?

As a supervisor, do you understand what boosts the morale of people in a group – and what undermines it? You may sometimes feel so much pressure to increase production; there is little time to think about the attitude of your crew. Yet things that boost a work group’s morale are the same things that boost your morale – feeling appreciated for what you do, feeling that people would care if you were hurt or absent, and feeling you are a valuable member of a team.

You May Have to Change Your Supervisory Style

If you naturally possess “people skills,” or have received up-to-date training in supervisory skills, the morale of your crew is probably good. But if your only training has come from observing others in a supervisor’s role, you may have followed the wrong role models. Many highly experienced supervisor’s use “top sergeant” or “leave’em alone” styles of leadership – neither of which builds team spirit. Today’s world and today’s work force are changing. To quote J. Paul Getty, “In times of change, experience may be your worst enemy.” The tips offered below are for the new management style. By paying adequate attention to people, production will often take care of itself.

Ten Tips For Boosting Morale and Safety

1. **Listen to your People:** Don’t always wait for problems before talking to crew members. Strike up a conversation now and then just for the purpose of getting to know them better. Ask questions, listen attentively and respond to what they say. Finding out what they think and feel doesn’t mean you must always agree with their personal opinions – but respect their views. If you lay groundwork for communication, they’ll more likely come to you with their concerns.
2. **Follow Up on Problems:** Once you have promised employees you’ll investigate a matter, follow up on their concerns, and do so as soon as possible. If you don’t they won’t come to you again, since their problems didn’t seem important to you. If suggestion can’t be carried out for some reason, explain why in detail, but encourage future input. And be sure to give full credit to those who point out problems or solutions.
3. **Deal with Rumors:** When changes or uncertainty are taking place in an organization, it’s particularly stressful to those who are not decision makers. When people can’t understand or control events that affect their lives, morale often hits bottom. Even when news is not good, keep in constant communication with the troops and convey any new information to them. It will help them feel respected and part of the team, instead of an “outsider.”
4. **Recognize Accomplishments:** In a survey of worker needs, employees ranked “Credit for Their Work” as the #1 item of importance. Morale is highest when employees feel their contributions are appreciated. Let them know they are important and that you value their efforts. This is easier to do for the “high achievers.” But remember that everyone needs “strokes” so find ways to give them.

5. **Relieve Boredom:** The item ranked as the #2 employee need was “Interest in Their Work.” A line worker’s job can be repetitive and monotonous, but supervisor’s can often help employees stave off fatigue. Many companies provide music for workers. Often people can be rotated to different tasks every few days to alleviate boredom. It’s hard to maintain enthusiasm for a tiresome job, but even small changes can improve morale. Find creative ways to do this without upsetting production.
6. **Take a Personal Interest in People:** Both morale and performance improve when the company shows an interest in employees. Individuals need to be treated like people and not producers on numbers on the ledger. Send a card when a crew member is sick, or make a get-well phone call. Employees are flattered when their supervisor chats with them about their hobbies and interests. In the case of line employees with tedious jobs, this can even help alleviate boredom
7. **Show That You Care About Safety:** As supervisor, you broadcast your attitude about safety everyday. If it’s a high priority, your crew knows it. If it takes a second place to production, they know that too. The list of responsibilities is long and well covered in these publications. But the key is your involvement. You can’t delegate the well being of your crew to someone else. It is your direction and example the crew follows. When employees realize you care as much about their safety as if they were family, they’ll know you think of them as individuals, not just as manpower. If they know you would never risk the safety or life of your workers in order to increase production, or get a job done more quickly, the crew’s morale will be high.
8. **Promote Teamwork:** Encourage team spirit by helping employees get to know each other. Some companies do this through newsletters, bowling teams, picnics, and other events where employees can socialize. You can build teamwork in your own crew by acknowledging the contributions of all members and discouraging personal competition. Consider the following quote: “A group becomes a team when all members are sure enough of themselves and their contributions to praise the skill of others.” In today’s world, where people often don’t know their next door neighbor, belonging to a supportive work group can be an important morale booster.
9. **Earn Respect:** Production workers generally have more respect for a supervisor who has come up from the ranks and understands the job. But employees frequently mention that their morale is also affected by the quality of supervision they receive. This includes receiving appropriate job assignments, adequate training and instructions, and fair evaluations. Respect is also given to supervisors who show respect – who keep their cool, rather than losing their temper, and who can counsel and correct employees without belittling them. If you haven’t already done so, complete the checklist in Supervisor Safety Update to evaluate your coaching and disciplinary style.
10. **Encourage Pride – In Workmanship and the Job:** Most people spend at least one-half of their waking hours at the job site. Yet, how many people enjoy a feeling of pride and satisfaction in what they do from 9 to 5? As a supervisor, you can help those you supervise realize how their role in creating a useful product or quality service is important. This requires quality control, along with consistent praise to the workforce for maintaining high standard. Employees, who take pride in their work, and the company they work for, generally have high personal morale.

Your Challenge As A Supervisor

Your actions and attitude affect many people’s lives, as well as the success of the company. The morale of your crew, as defined earlier, is greatly in your hands. Building a proud, unified work group is not a simple challenge, and doesn’t happen overnight, but success is certain to boost your own morale along with everyone else’s.