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## Boosting Your Crew's Morale

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

**W**ebster's dictionary 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, greatly depends upon whether or not the group is reaching its goals. But good morale also requires each person to feel valued, and believe they are led by top quality personnel.

### Is the Morale of Your Work Team High?

How would you rate your work group? Do you hear laughter very often? And if so, are people laughing in fun, "with" each other, or "at" someone in mockery? Does energy and enthusiasm of the team seem to be high, or do workers dawdle as much as they can? Do crewmembers 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. 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.

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### Employee Morale & 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, so that both production and quality control are impacted. 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 have higher productivity and produce higher quality products. In addition, studies have shown that when employees perceived their company as supportive, and themselves as 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, the message sent to employees is that preventing employee injuries 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 behaviors. The obvious potential is more frequent and severe injuries.

## What Affects the Morale of a Team?

As a supervisor, do you understand what **boosts** the morale of people in your 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 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 supervisors use "drill 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 a management style that may help you build solid morale.

## Ten Tips for Boosting Morale & Safety:

- 1. Listen to Your People:** Don't always wait for problems before talking to crewmembers. 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 may not come to you again, since their problems didn't seem important to you before. If suggestions can't be carried out for some reason, explain why in detail, but encourage future input. 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.

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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 supervisors can often help employees stave off fatigue. 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 or numbers on the ledger. Send a card when a crewmember 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 a supervisor, you broadcast your attitude about safety everyday. If it's a high priority, your crew knows it. If it takes second place to production, they know that too. The list of supervisor safety management responsibilities is long, 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 the life -- of a crewmember 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 skills of others.” In today's world, where people may not 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.
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? 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 standards. Employees, who take pride in their work and the company they work for will 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 is largely in your hands. Building a proud, unified work group is not a simple challenge and it doesn't happen overnight. But success is certain to boost your own morale along with all those that you supervise.