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Motivating employees without breaking the bank

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Keeping employees motivated these days is a tough job.

Not only is there a tremendous amount of uncertainty in the workplace, but many employees are being asked to do more with less with no extra pay to show for it.

As an employer, you may not be able to shower employees with cash or bonuses during these tough times, but that doesn't mean there aren't other low-cost perks you can be offering to help boost morale, experts say. It just requires commitment and some creative thinking on your part.

"It doesn't have to cost a lot to have a major impact on employee motivation," says Bob Nelson of Nelson Motivation Inc. in San Diego, author of "1001 Ways to Reward Employees" (Workman Publishing, \$13.95) and co-author of "The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook" (Workman Publishing, \$17.95). "The best forms of motivation, ironically, have the least cost."

Often, companies think they need an elaborate rewards program, Nelson says. But simple acts like asking employees their opinions, involving them in a decision, or thanking them for a job well done can go a long way, he says.

"Managers need to be more emotionally intelligent," adds Tom Terez, founder of BetterWorkplaceNow.com in Columbus, Ohio, and author of "22 Keys to Creating A Meaningful Workplace" (Adams Media, \$35.95). "They need to spend more time with their employees and less time in their office."

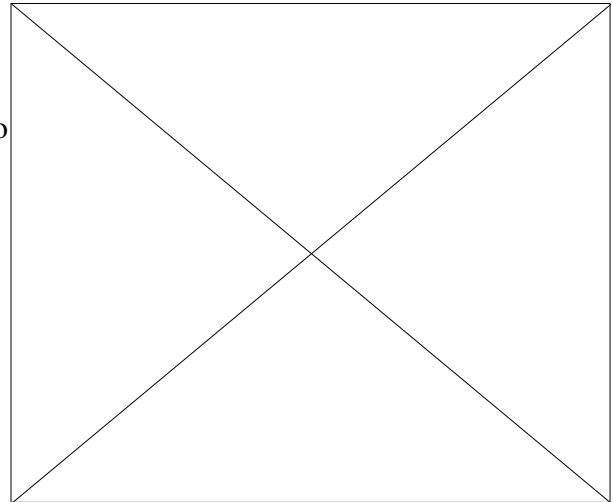
And they need to think outside the box to come up with creative low-cost ways to motivate staff. There are lots of ways to do it, and here are just a few to get you started.

Incentives and performance

If employees hit or exceed certain performance standards, they receive some sort of agreed-upon bonus payment, explains Paul Munoz of The HR Group Inc. in Plainview, a human resources consulting firm. If the goal isn't met, there's no expense to the company.

Suggestion programs

If an employee comes up with a suggestion that either makes or saves the company money, he or she would receive an agreed-upon payment, such as 10 percent of the overall savings, Munoz explains.



Career path program Take stock of all the jobs within your company and chart the different paths employees can take to move up the ranks, he adds. This can be a great motivator, notes Vinni Gaines of Enhanced Customer Care Solutions, an outsourced call center in Melville that's using The HR Group to institute such a program. "It gives employees vision of how they can grow financially," explains Gaines, who also uses performance incentives and a suggestion program to engage employees.

Appreciation rewards

Who wouldn't like to get tickets to a movie, play or sporting event? asks Bob Chanin, director of human resources for the Alcott Group, a professional employer organization in Farmingdale. These incentives could be tied to performance or length of service, he adds.

Lunch and learn

Have employees brown-bag it or bring in a pizza and invite a speaker to come on site and give an informative seminar. Often you can find community speakers who will do this for free, Chanin says.

Hold a picnic or fun event

That's what The EGC Group does. The Melville marketing agency has periodic company picnics at the park across the street from its office in the summer, president Ernie Canadeo says. EGC provides grilled foods and supplies and employees contribute homemade salads and desserts. It also honors an employee of the month with a \$100 award, holds monthly employee birthday breakfasts and recently added a library area for employees.

Walking / wellness programs

Groups like the American Heart Association offer different programs, including Start!, which provides companies with a free kit to set up walking routes at the workplace. ([Click here](#) for details.)

For more low-cost ideas, check out Nelson's site. ([Click here](#) for details.)

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