

## Setting Goals and Rewards

### Motivating Employees Performing a Seemingly Thankless Job

By Steve Holder

This example reveals one way a great manager can set goals and rewards for staff who are doing seemingly thankless work, and gives you principles you, too, can use.

Sometimes, no matter how necessary a job is, it can be just plain boring, and motivating employees performing mindless work can be a real challenge. This example illustrates one way great managers set goals and rewards in this type of situation, and discusses the principles involved.

#### The Example

Consider dishwashing in a restaurant. The restaurant manager's objective is to grow the bottom line by increasing patronage and the average tab per diner, turning tables as quickly as possible, and holding the line on costs. As this relates to dishwashing, the manager's subgoals are speed, low costs, no breakage and spotless dishware.

Needless to say, it can be difficult to frame those objectives in a way that excites the dishwashing staff.

One way to approach this dilemma is to enroll them in the bigger picture. It may not be clear to everyone how a dirty fork can ruin a diner's experience and negatively impact the restaurant's fortunes. Or how being slow in getting dishes to the front can slow table turn and profits. The dishwashers need to understand how their job affects the business, and why doing it well helps the business succeed. And they need to feel appreciated when they do their work conscientiously.

Something a great manager might do is to establish a weekly reward for zero defects -- no breakage, not being out of clean dishware or silverware up front, and no one finding a dish, glass, or utensil improperly washed. A \$5 gift certificate to the restaurant given to each member of the dishwashing staff every week it meets the zero defects goal, accompanied by the manager's handshake and personal thank you, could make all the difference in the world to them. Accumulating gift certificates to bring friends or family to a free dinner could enable them to experience the importance of what they do from the customer's viewpoint, and to demonstrate their pride in working there. For the manager, the gift certificate costs less than face value even though having dedicated, conscientious workers may be priceless.

The great manager would probably also personally meet the worker and his family and friends while they're dining to reinforce his appreciation, and cement the employee's loyalty.

## The Principles

A particular job may not be exciting or challenging, but it has an ultimate reason for being, and that reason relates to the business' success in some way. If it didn't, the job would be abolished.

These types of jobs often experience high turnover, which has its own costs. Motivating employees to do their best in these jobs while reducing turnover costs can be a real management challenge.

In the previous example, our hypothetical manager used several principles in setting goals and rewards for his staff.

**Communicate the Job's Importance** – When employees understand their role in the bigger picture of the company's success, they take more pride in their efforts no matter how menial the task.

**Establish Metrics** – Employees can't take pride in their success unless they know how to measure it. Even if there is no extrinsic reward, being able to benchmark themselves lets them know when they're doing well and provides some measure of job satisfaction.

**Reward the Team for Joint Performance** – When everyone on the team receives the reward, it encourages teamwork, and the team can become somewhat self-managing. Teammates will mentor a member who can't seem to go a week without dropping a dish, or they'll be helping the manager find his replacement pronto.

**Tie the Reward to the Business** – When the reward somehow ties back into the business, it brings employees closer to the company and provides opportunities for employees to improve their understanding of their roles. This can aid in retention, motivation, and job performance.

**Make it Personal** – Great managers know that employees are more loyal to people than they are to companies. The manager's sincere "Thank you" can go farther than many material rewards in stimulating loyalty, retention, and performance.

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