

# Tips for Improving Employee Morale and Reducing Absenteeism

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Low employee morale is often linked to high rates of absenteeism. That being the case, it would stand to reason that improving employee morale would reduce the absenteeism rate. In order to improve employee morale, one must identify the causes of low morale. These causes can be different in each particular company or department within the company. Following is a discussion of the most common causes of low morale, as well as a plan to reduce absenteeism using techniques that work on those particular causes.

Common causes of low morale include stress; rumors, negativity, and gossip within the workplace; and a lack of incentive programs. The proposed solutions will deal with low morale brought on by these grounds, thus increasing employee attitudes and improving attendance. Although the advantages of these solutions will be highlighted, possible disadvantages will also be presented.

## **Stress**

Stress is the most common cause of low employee morale. Several factors may increase the stress levels of employees, but the main reason employees experience stress is their relationship with their manager, and it has been shown that highly authoritarian managers are likely to cause an increase in absenteeism. Therefore, when absenteeism rates are particularly high in a certain department, poor employee relationships with the manager should be considered. Management training could help resolve this issue.

### **Proposed Solution: Management Training**

A good management training program will teach the authoritative manager techniques to aid him or her in becoming a facilitating manager. The manager incorporating this style encourages employees to come forward with issues and suggestions, listens carefully, does not leave employees hanging, keeps employees up to date about what is going on in the business, encourages creativity, is consistent in the administration of rules and policies, and does not make employees feel that they will be penalized for mistakes.

The advantages of management training are many. Employee morale is bolstered and absenteeism rates will decline. Additionally, an authoritarian manager with poor listening and communication skills who sets unreachable goals and is inflexible is now given the opportunity to become a much better manager. In situations like these, not only do the employees benefit, but the manager also benefits by having a better working relationship with his or her employees. The better working relationship is also conducive to higher productivity and increased work quality.

There are several disadvantages to management training. The manager in question may be resistant to the training. He or she may believe that his or her way of doing things is the right way and therefore may dismiss ideas presented in training.

Manager training is also a time consuming process when implemented properly. First, a training plan must be formed. Then, a training schedule must be created, and conflicts may require postponement and rescheduling of some training sessions. Finally, a plan to follow up and provide feedback must be implemented. This helps to ensure that the manager understands and applies the techniques learned in training.

Even when management training has been completed and is deemed successful, employees may be resistant to the change. They may not trust the sincerity of the manager. It can take quite some time for the employees to trust the manager and respond to the new management style.

## **Rumors, Negativity, and Gossip**

Rumors, negativity, and gossip among employees can foster low morale and increase absenteeism. It is not unusual for employees to call in sick because they are afraid of or angry with another employee.

### **Proposed Solution: Teambuilding**

Teambuilding can help eliminate these negative actions by fostering respect among employees. Teams should be created that give team members the responsibility and power to solve problems, plan, and make decisions. Solving problems makes members feel like they are needed, while planning helps members learn techniques to implement various solutions. The power to make decisions helps employees realize their importance to the company. This feeling of importance increases morale. It also improves attendance rates because this feeling of importance makes the employee feel like the company really needs their presence.

## **Takeaways**

- Employee absenteeism
- Employee morale
- Improve morale to reduce absenteeism

In order for teambuilding to work properly, the teams must be lead by someone with a facilitating nature. Facilitating leaders help team members feel empowered, think things through thoroughly, and utilize their individual talents. Team members with these skills will work well together and feel as though they are part of an important whole. Working well together in this manner will reduce or even eliminate incidences of negativity, rumors, and gossip.

There are several advantages to using teambuilding in an effort to increase morale and decrease absenteeism due to rumors, negativity, and gossip among employees. Working together in a team encourages members to combine their individual strengths. Individual weaknesses are less pronounced, because other members' strengths naturally make up for those weaknesses. Members appreciate each other more because they experience each others' strengths first hand, and appreciate the help they get from others in areas where they are weak. Rumors and negativity are eliminated because members are now working together, instead of competing against each other.

People working together in a team also feel needed. Feeling needed promotes a sense of responsibility, and people who feel needed tend to have better attendance rates.

Disadvantages to team building may occur if the team leader is controlling or authoritative. Controlling leadership reduces communication within the team, which may cause the proposed solution to backfire by causing more problems among team members.

Individual agendas of some team members may magnify problems that teambuilding was supposed to solve. Power struggles can happen without proper leadership.

Employee resistance can also be a problem. If the rumors, negativity, and gossip among employees have gotten to an extreme level, teambuilding may not be possible, because employees' negative feelings will be so severe that they resist any attempt to work with the other employees.

### **Lack of Incentive**

A lack of incentive programs can contribute to low morale and increased absenteeism. Employees lacking incentive feel that they have no good reasons to show up to work.

### **Proposed Solution: Develop Incentive Programs**

Well formed incentive programs can improve both attitude and attendance rates. This works for several reasons. Some employees may lack the internal motivation necessary to keep their spirits up and give them the drive and desire to show up to work every day. These people may need the external motivation that incentives provide.

Additionally, incentives tend to promote certain goals, which can be beneficial for employees with attendance problems. The company can create an incentive program that is specifically linked to attendance. Examples of this type of program include:

- 1) The ability to cash-in unused sick days at the end of a specific period
- 2) Allowing employees to leave early one Friday per month of perfect attendance
- 3) Bonus pay for periods of perfect attendance
- 4) Gifts and point based incentives for periods of perfect attendance

Employees should contribute to the formation of the attendance incentive program. Things that need to be considered are the type of incentive and the length of time between incentives. Input and feedback from employees will help decision-makers choose the program that will work best for the specific people involved. This will help in the creation of one or more successful attendance incentive programs.

Link any proposed solution to low morale and high absenteeism, incentive programs have both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include increased morale and reduced absenteeism. Another advantage is the feeling of appreciation that employees get when they realize that the employer is willing reward them for perfect attendance. Attendance incentive programs provide recognition to employees for positive qualities. In this case, the positive quality is responsibility.

One disadvantage to incentive programs is that creating an effective program costly and time consuming. It is often recommended that organizations begin with offering small incentives and expand the program to larger incentives if necessary. Although this approach does make sense, this type of experimentation can be expensive.

Another disadvantage is that the more diverse the workplace, the more difficult it will be to create a program that is effective for all or most of the employees. For example, it may be more effective to provide more frequent rewards to younger workers or workers who

perform more difficult work. However, this formula is difficult to follow when working with an employee base that covers a wide range of ages and jobs that contain varying degrees of difficulty. However, with proper research and planning, it is possible to create a successful attendance incentive program. (Engaging the services of a professional incentives company can overcome these issues.)