

## COMMENTARY

# Creating a motivational work environment

Guest commentary by Nina Colburn

Motivating employees is often “Job One” for today’s busy supervisor or manager.

Getting our workers to take the extra step to finish a job just right or make the customer feel just a little bit better is a managerial task that never seems to end.

Yet motivated employees — employees who understand and buy in to the company’s needs and goals — are absolutely vital to creating success and profitability in our highly competitive world.

It’s a challenging task, to be sure.

Hourly workers are often stressed out from juggling unbelievable personal schedules, with child care, transportation, second jobs and working spouses all competing for their energy and share of mind at work.

For the growing number of workers from countries south of our border, the personal challenges are greater yet, increasing dramatically the challenge the supervisor faces.

Latino workers come to the United States and work for short periods of time, sending money home to their families who are depending on the money to survive in their native land.

The workers who are here often live in survival mode, too, sharing small rooms with other Spanish-speaking workers, riding buses or walking to work. Most of their paycheck is sent south for family members. If they have children here, the problems multiply again.

So, what’s the manager with large numbers of Spanish-speaking workers to do?

It’s important to start by understanding the things that are of high value to a Latin American worker.

Here’s a checklist of work factors of importance to the Spanish-speaking employee. Use it as you assess your motivational environment at your work place:

1) The worker needs to feel that he makes a difference ... that his presence is important. Respect and consideration from group peers is very important.

2) A good relationship with the boss is vital. Does the boss know his name and the names of his family members? Does the boss ask about the worker’s family and show a genuine interest in the well being of the worker?

3) Praise and recognition on a regular basis go a long way. We here in the States are very task-oriented. We are expected to complete a job out of a sense of duty. In the Latino culture, the most important thing is the boss-worker relationship. Once that is solid, the job will be done well and with pride. This cannot be emphasized enough.

4) Make an effort to speak his or her language and encourage them to learn and speak ours.

5) Offer training programs in specific job skills and offer on-site English language classes.

6) Show an interest in his or her country. Use their music, food

and holiday celebrations to help you make that connection. Remember, too, that each country in Latin America is different. Don’t refer to someone from Central America as Mexican or someone from Mexico as a Spaniard.

7) Instill incentive programs for punctuality, overtime and extra effort to finish a project ahead of schedule.

8) Let the worker know that you know and appreciate how things are done in his or her country, but that “this is the way it is done here” ...or this is the way you want it done here.

With this knowledge in mind, you’ll be on the way to more effective motivational programs at work. Sure, you must stay on top of what is happening in your group from day to day ... and you can’t ever expect a Latino worker to tell you what his or her needs are at work ... and, yes, motivational programs can back-track easily, but you’ll have greater likelihood of seeing your efforts translate to rising productivity with these ideas in play.

Give these ideas a try. You’ll be surprised at how quickly they can pay dividends in the work place and on the bottom line.



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