Staff Motivation:  
*Keeping your team refreshed.*

People leave jobs for various reasons. Some reasons include: lack of professional development, lack of pay raises, they did not get along with bosses or co-workers and lack of motivation towards the job. You name the reason for leaving, it probably has been used. What keeps workers at their jobs? Is it compensation, benefits, a chance to climb the ladder or do they just enjoy helping people? This article will focus on staff motivation and will highlight strategies that can be implemented to keep both employees and employers of the non-profit sector motivated.

Sources of motivation may differ for employees and employers. For front line staff some motivators are a good paying salary, benefits, seeing clients better themselves, and having a hand in rebuilding the community. For managers they also subscribe to the employee motivators, but they also have other motivators. Some of those motivators are a good bottom line, bonuses, meeting performance numbers, promotions, and running a productive department.

As employees we may often get caught up in asking ourselves “what can they do to make my job run smoother.” Some people spend countless moments thinking along those lines. The ownership around motivating staff is not the sole responsibility of the employer. A possible way to avoid motivation issues at work may be to work more efficiently. Staff should take inventory on themselves and assess what they can do to work more efficiently. Some of the things that employees can do to work more efficiently are:

- Do not procrastinate when it comes to work.
- Complete tasks that are assigned.
- If you need help with something, ask for it.
- Do not play office politics or get caught in the rumor mill.
- Remain professional.
- Organize your work tasks and monitor your work load.
- Find a balance between personal and professional responsibilities.

One of the possible causes for lack of motivation may be personal stress. It is hard for us to keep our personal stress out of our professional lives. For as much as we can do while on the job; there are plenty of things we can do while not in the office to help with our stress levels. Life style changes are a good place to start. Some of the changes employees can make in their personal lives that can decrease their stress levels are:

- Maintain a proper balanced diet.
- Get an adequate amount of sleep.
- Ensure exercise and physical activity is a part of your daily routine.
• Take some time for reflection.
• Leave the job at work, don’t bring it home.

Bosses, managers, and people who make decisions sometimes get so busy with implementing programs, raising funds and running the day to day affairs of the organization that the morale of the staff often gets overlooked. It is imperative that managers set aside some time to make sure that their front line staff is getting the proper resources and support they need in order to be a productive worker. Poor staff morale is one of the biggest reasons why employees lose motivation in their jobs. There are a variety of things that employers can do for its staff to keep up the staff’s morale. Some of them are:

• Offer performance or yearly raises.
• Have monthly luncheons with employees.
• Have periodic team building exercises.
• Offer health club memberships as part of the benefit packages.
• Encourage open dialogue about matters pertaining to work.
• When appropriate, offer business casual work attire.
• Host productive meetings.
• Recognize staff contributions.
• Offer telecommuting options.

The Youthbuild program is unique, in that as a national program there are sites in major cities, suburbs and rural areas. We were fortunate enough to get the chance to speak with some programs from all areas and find out what it takes for them to stay motivated and to continue to serve the youth. We were able to talk with both front line staff and managers to get their input. The feedback we received was excellent and the responses varied from person to person. Here are some of the responses we received.

Tia Lewis, AmeriCorps Vista Volunteer at ReSource Vermont says, “working for a well run organization is what motivates me to keep going to work each day. Seeing the student’s progress brightens my outlook, and my adoration for my co-workers and students are the main reasons I keep it going.”

Patty Sausser, Case Manager at Alliance Business and Training says, “motivation for me is seeing our students make progress and go forward. When I see the students do something well or make progress I make sure I let them know how great they have done and they usually beam. (A smile motivates me!) What also motivates me is seeing them grow and believe in themselves.” Patty also went on to say “in my off hours I take advantage of the outdoors and the abundance of great things there are to do in NE Tennessee that are free.”

Rose Mary Anderson, Program Supervisor for Youthbuild Jacksonville says, “The motivation I receive from doing my job is that we are saving lives through educating young people and giving
them an opportunity to get back on track for a better life through job training and furthering their education. It feels good to provide assistance to our participants who are male inmates, who have made mistakes in their life. This really motivates me and gives me hope that we are not working in vain.”

“As a manager I always give praise for jobs well done and remind them that we are a team and if one falls short we all give support to each other. Also, periodically I treat the staff to lunch and we do not discuss any business just enjoy the fellowship together.”

“Through the years I have learned that all work and no play/pleasure will cause stress. When I leave work, I LEAVE WORK. In other words I relax for an hour and 3 days a week I go to water aerobics. This helps me to be fresh the next day to conquer whatever is needed.”

Loretta Carroll Stewart, Youthbuild Director Morehead State University says, “as for motivating me as I work with Youthbuild, I love it when the students succeed. We have alumni that stop in and visit us and nothing brightens the day more than hearing that they are doing well. Often our current students can be a handful and provide lots of frustration and lots of drama sometimes. The knowledge that previous frustrating students are now doing well is always a comforting thought.”

“In regards to keeping staff motivated we moved to a four-day week for participants to allow staff one day a week for staff meetings and weekly planning. This gives them one day to recharge and regroup when the students aren’t here. During our weekly meetings we try to acknowledge the things that everyone is doing well (not just the things that need work) and highlight the successes of our students past and present. Staff input in programming issues is very important and tends to be a vital component in staff morale. We try to get all the staff involved in various YB training events and encourage them to network with staff in other Youthbuild programs. Lastly, as the summer months approach, we are working with staff to plan vacation time, as this “mental health time” can be important in keeping staff energized and refreshed.”

Loretta says she engages in Pond Therapy during her off time. She expressed that a couple of years ago, she and her husband installed a Koi pond in their yard. This was a rather large do-it yourself project, but she really enjoys the work and finds that when she is working on her pond, she does not think about anything else but the task at hand.

Lisa Anderson, Youthbuild Manager at Michigan Works stated that she makes herself readily available to all staff. It is important that they feel heard and that they have a safe, sympathetic, positive place/person to vent their frustrations. She also tries to be solution focused rather than problem focused and encourage them to work out logical steps and plans to solve problems with youth and within their organization. Having a sense of humor is key. She encourages staff to utilize the motivational power of laughter and she makes fun of herself quite often to remind them to lighten up. She finished by saying she subscribes to a daily managerial website called Partners for Community Solutions 866-383-8900 youthbuild@partnerscs.org
"Walk the Talk". It sends a motivational quote every day that she shares with staff if she feels it is Youthbuild worthy.

In her spare time she reads, walks and watches movies. She said “some movies keep her inspired” such as "Boys Town" with Spencer Tracey and Mickey Rooney and "My Life as a House" with Kevin Kline and she tells her Youthbuild staff to watch them. She added that she also talks with her son and his friends about their opinions on current teen issues. They help her get the youth perspective and help her stay current on what the youth are "into". Being able to somewhat speak their language and understand their culture keeps her motivated because she truly does value the youth.

Motivation is something that every worker needs in order to remain productive. Sources of motivation are different for every person. Employers have a responsibility to maintain an organizational structure and culture that promotes staff motivation. Employers and employees should work together to find the answers to the motivation question.

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