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People Power

Few sectors have seen more change and greater competition than the debt purchase sector. Annette Martinelli, MCIPD, Human Resources and Training Manager at The Lowell Group, outlines the importance of staff motivation to achieving business success.

Rapid change is prevalent in most sectors of business these days but this is especially so in the financial industries and particularly the debt sector. Against this backdrop, it's more important than ever that your business has targets that drive continuous improvement and that you're hitting or exceeding these targets.

At Lowell we understand the achievement of our targets is influenced by a huge number of factors ranging from determining and identifying the correct goals to having the right people and sharing the goals with our employees. A successful growing business will understand it is important to acknowledge and accommodate a vast range of factors in the success equation.

To put this into simple terms:

Goals + Resources + Motivation = Target Success

Each of these three areas directly influence whether you hit or miss your targets and should be regularly questioned and examined to ensure your business is flexible and can best accommodate change.

So for example, analyse your **Goals** - are they SMART? Have they been clearly communicated? Do your targets have stretch in them? Are they in line with company values? Are they robust?

Additionally, in terms of your **Resources**, have you recruited the right people? Are they equipped with the right skills to perform? Do you have efficient systems? Do you have sufficient management information to help you monitor progress and identify areas of weakness?

And finally, **Motivation**, which is often the area that gets neglected by an employer. It is also, admittedly, probably the most difficult area to influence and as you might imagine from my HR perspective, is the most important!

Motivation - To achieve anything in life requires a degree of motivation, from getting out of bed to making dinner, but it's particularly important to be motivated when we're working towards a target.

Motivation is defined as 'goal directed behaviour' so in order to motivate an individual to perform you must provide them with a goal.

Imagine the scenario of having a target of losing a stone in weight. You can apply the above equation to ensure you successfully achieve this. Your goal is to lose a stone in weight within two months. The resource that you have is your gym kit, a gym, gym membership and obviously yourself.

However, unless you can motivate yourself at the end of a hard day in a busy office to drive to the hot steamy gym through the spring sunshine instead of going home to a BBQ and perhaps a glass of wine, you're going to have trouble shedding even a pound.

Properly motivated, people can be incentivised to positively change their behaviours: to increase the pace at which they work or the amount of care and attention they give to it. The key here is 'properly' motivated. So how do we 'properly' motivate a whole company?

The first mistake most managers make is to assume that everyone is motivated by the same things. They may implement an incentive and assume that this will be sufficient to drive everyone to improve their performance.

It is important to remember that Motivation is **individual**. It's by no means a 'one size fits all' concept. People are not all motivated by the same things to the same degree. Their motives will depend on individual values and beliefs. We must appreciate that we're managing 'individuals' and individual people will have individual motives that drive them to perform.

So how do we uncover the great mystery of discovering what motivates our people so that we can optimise their performance and generate great success?

Well this message may seem obvious but you'd be amazed how many businesses don't do this - the simple answer is ask them!

Unless you spend time with your people and find out what drives them then any motivational activities you introduce will fall flat.

People are motivated by all different kinds of things including a desire for recognition of a job well done, by competitiveness, because they are success and goal orientated, by feeling involved in decision making, by interesting work and by the opportunity to progress to name a few.

It's also important not to neglect the element of fun in the workplace. Research has found that laughter has medicinal qualities offering physical, psychological and physiological benefits. In the workplace, a fun environment can also increase productivity, encourage creativity and enhance team building so it's worth creating an environment where people are enjoying themselves.

Another element that can have a huge influence on team motivation is your own enthusiasm and drive.

If you compare the departments in your organisation that are achieving versus those that aren't, consider the manager who is leading each of those areas. Is that manager role modelling good behaviour? Are they demonstrating enthusiasm and a desire to achieve? Or do they appear to be deflated and lack energy. In the majority of cases, a team will mirror the behaviour of the leader. Whatever your attitude is to the challenges that you face in your business, this is the attitude that your people will have. If they see doubt, concern, a lack of engagement with the business, that is the behaviour and attitude they will mirror. If they are given a positive, 'can-do' role model, you will notice it's infectious and will transfer to your staff.

In short, these are the key messages to remember when motivating your teams and in turn drive performance.

Firstly, motivation is not a one size fits all concept. You must ensure you are reaching all contributors.

Secondly, if you want to know what motivates your people, ask them! There's no point just guessing what to do in order to motivate people.

And finally, motivation in your business has to come from you! Consider your own behaviour and see if you can see the same behaviour in your people. You can influence how they feel and in the words of Robert Louis Stevenson "Keep your fears to yourself, but share your inspiration with others".

The Lowell Group is one of the fastest-growing companies in the UK. Created in May 2004, it is on target to achieve £50 million turnover this year.

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