



What Did You Say?

Why Questions Can Be Your Most Powerful Motivational Tool

Engagement and motivation are two major buzzwords in management. You've probably read countless articles or books, attended seminars, and still found yourself challenged when you sit down to figure out how to reach every employee at your company.



And therein lies the rub. Unless you ask, you don't know what will engage and motivate your workforce. But instead of handing out surveys or making your employees sit through countless focus group meetings, ask them one simple question: What would you do in my place? That's right. Give your employees the chance to be armchair quarterbacks, or CEO for a day. Ask them what they would do to improve things at your company if they were in charge.

Be Responsive

The key to this exercise is listening--and hopefully making changes. If you decide to give your employees this outlet to express themselves, you need to respond to each and every suggestion. Tell each employee what you think about their ideas and provide actual, thoughtful feedback: be open and honest, but tell them if their ideas can work and your reasons for saying yes or no.

Some of the input will be related to a person's specific job, but many will relate to broader issues. You'll find out how your employees really feel about your corporate culture, their workload and their place in the organization. And getting that alternate perspective can be valuable. It can help change your perspective on how things should be done if you're open to suggestions.



Be Ready

You may be surprised by what you hear. You may think you're promoting a "family atmosphere" but discover that people feel alienated. You may find that your hands-off management style makes employees feel that they don't get enough support or input during projects. You may discover that some of your policies and procedures no longer fit the way you're doing business. So you may find yourself having to make some major changes in how you run your company.

Make It Easy

How can you get this valuable feedback? You don't want it to be completely anonymous, because you want to be able to give personal responses. But people, as a rule, feel a little safer typing out their thoughts into a computer. Try setting up an online forum on your company intranet, or a separate email address that goes directly to you. Assure your employees that you will be the only one who knows what they said.

Give as much or as little structure to your request as you like. Ask people simply to answer the question, "What would you do if you were CEO for a day?" Present them with two or three specific questions to answer regarding your culture, workplace environment, benefits or management style.

Summary

If you can take these suggestions and use them to make changes--and let everyone know why you've made the changes--you'll have automatically and easily ramped up both motivation and engagement. By making employees feel that they've been heard, that their opinions matter and that you want to make the changes that will make them happy (to the best of your ability), you'll find yourself reaping the benefits of lower turnover and higher productivity. So go on, give up the reins, at least figuratively speaking. You might be pleasantly surprised at where your employees will lead you.

