



8 Things Your Employees Need Most

Forget about raises and better benefits. Those are important -- but this is what your staff really wants.

By Jeff Haden | Feb 2, 2012

[Pay is important.](#) But pay only goes so far.

Getting a raise is like buying a bigger house; soon, more becomes the new normal.

Higher wages won't cause employees to automatically perform at a higher level. Commitment, work ethic, and motivation are not based on pay.

To truly care about your business, your employees need these eight things—and they need them *from you*:

1. Freedom. Best practices can create excellence, but every task doesn't deserve a best practice or a micro-managed approach. (Yes, even you, fast food industry.)

Autonomy and latitude breed engagement and satisfaction. Latitude also breeds innovation. Even manufacturing and heavily process-oriented positions have room for different approaches.

Whenever possible, give your employees the freedom to work they way they work best.

2. Targets. Goals are fun. Everyone—yes, even you—is at least a little competitive, if only with themselves. Targets create a sense of purpose and add a little meaning to even the most repetitive tasks.

Without a goal to shoot for, work is just work. And work sucks.

3. Mission. We all like to feel a part of something bigger. Striving to be worthy of words like "best" or "largest" or "fastest" or "highest quality" provides a sense of purpose.

Let employees know what you want to achieve, for your business, for customers, and even your community. And if you can, let them create a few missions of their own.

Caring starts with knowing what to care about—and why.

4. Expectations. While every job should include some degree of latitude, every job needs basic expectations regarding the way specific situations should be handled. Criticize an employee for expediting shipping today, even though last week that was the standard procedure if on-time delivery was in jeopardy, and you lose that employee.

Few things are more stressful than not knowing what your boss expects from one minute to the next.

When standards change make sure you communicate those changes first. When you can't, explain why this particular situation is different, and why you made the decision you made.

5. Input. Everyone wants to offer suggestions and ideas. Deny employees the opportunity to make suggestions, or shoot their ideas down without consideration, and you create robots.

Robots don't care.

Make it easy for employees to offer suggestions. When an idea doesn't have merit, take the time to explain why. You can't implement every idea, but you can always make employees feel valued for their ideas.

6. Connection. Employees don't want to work for a paycheck; they want to work with and for people.

A kind word, a short discussion about family, a brief check-in to see if they need anything... those individual moments are much more important than meetings or formal evaluations.

7. Consistency. Most people can deal with a boss who is demanding and quick to criticize... as long as he or she treats every employee the same. (Think of it as the [Tom Coughlin effect](#).)

While you should treat each employee differently, you must treat each employee fairly. (There's a big difference.)

The key to maintaining consistency is to communicate. The more employees understand why a decision was made the less likely they are to assume favoritism or unfair treatment.

8. Future. Every job should have the potential to lead to something more, either within or outside your company.

For example, I worked at a manufacturing plant while I was in college. I had no real future with the company. Everyone understood I would only be there until I graduated.

One day my boss said, "Let me show you how we set up our production board."

I raised an eyebrow; why show me? He said, "Even though it won't be here, some day, somewhere, you'll be in charge of production. You might as well start learning now."

Take the time to develop employees for jobs they someday hope to fill—even if those positions are outside your company. (How will you know what they hope to do? Try asking.)

Employees will care about your business when you care about them first.

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