

How to motivate those facing redundancy

A Guest Article by Steve Grace
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A strategy to gain commitment

How does a business get the commitment of key employees who know their exit is imminent?

In tough economic conditions the need to reduce “fat” and become a leaner operation will, perhaps predictably, often command increased importance, and as a result will climb to the top of the corporate priority list. With organic growth stagnant, reducing the cost to market understandably becomes the key driver in increasing margins, with success in reducing costs invariably leading to a reduction in the workforce.

However, the dilemma faced by those businesses who can relate to the scenario is that transition from today’s operation to tomorrow’s operation is likely to need the skills, effort and expertise of employees who will know (or will get to realise) that they will be impacted by the change.

Outlined below is a five-step strategy to ensure that the outcome is satisfactory, on budget and on time.

1. Make the need for change very clear

The grapevine will have probably already done its work in terms of communicating that something is afoot, but this communication channel is likely to focus on “what” is happening and “how” it impacts individuals. The workforce needs to acknowledge the “why”, so that emotional responses such as denial and resistance can be tackled head on.

2. Set the boundaries

It’s likely that a significant proportion of the workforce will feel a sense of betrayal, with revenge being a typical emotional response. In a business environment, key information holders are likely to express this emotion by becoming withdrawn and disengaging, waiting for the proposed change to fail.

Individuals need to be clear that there are two possible outcomes:

- The change will be implemented successfully.
- The change will not be successful, but it *will* be implemented.

Of course, this may come over as slightly aggressive. So the next step should be to acknowledge to the team that to generate the successful outcome you will need their expertise, versatility and positive attitude. In return, they will get to

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build experience and capabilities that are likely to be looked upon favourably by alternative employers.

Acknowledge that you are powerless to force participation, but emphasise that maintaining the status quo is not an option. Each individual has the chance to get involved, learn, enhance existing capabilities and build new ones. Alternatively, they can sit on the sidelines. But it's a choice they have to make.

3. Put yourself in their shoes

Managers are often heard to discuss milestones in terms of what's good for the business, or maybe what would be viewed favourably by senior colleagues. Even when future employment status is not an issue, the workforce will often react rather cynically to the communication. So it's not too hard to imagine how a team facing redundancy will take it.

In these circumstances, try constantly to split your thoughts into "your" camp and "their" camp. The key is to make it clear that a deadline needs to be met, but then focus on why that is great for them.

Maybe it allows you a chance to delegate and provide career development for someone? Maybe it will free them up for a job interview if the milestone is completed? Maybe it will allow time in working hours to study for that qualification they wanted? Maybe there is scope for a monetary reward that may give individuals a bit more breathing space to find alternative employment?

However, whatever it might be, all these ideas are pointless if your workforce doesn't see the benefit, which brings us to point 4.

4. Find out what individuals value

Many people – not just business owners – make the mistake of thinking that others want what they want. Take the old saying that parents often teach their children: "Treat others how you expect to be treated yourself". The good intentions are clear, but what parents should really be instilling in their offspring is: "Treat others how *they* expect to be treated".

You will need to make a concerted effort to find out whether your workforce values money, time, learning or responsibility. A few general questions about work, hobbies and interests can often give a feel for what individuals value. Then it's up to you to tailor your communication so that it captures their attention.

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5. Be sure to walk the walk

Along the journey, you too are going to become frustrated: someone lets you down, an issue arises that becomes a thorn in your side, deadlines slip for whatever reason. You may have generated commitment from the team, and this group of people who are facing redundancy may all be pulling together to get the job done. However, all that hard work can be quickly undone if they suddenly notice in you the type of behaviour you initially discouraged.

Remaining positive is actually hard work for a lot of people. So if you start apportioning blame, pointing the finger and discrediting individuals, others will quickly see this as a signal that it's acceptable to act this way. For a team who know their future with the business is short, this is likely to be disastrous.

The only way forward is to remain calm, accept that you are where you are, and focus on what has to be done to rectify the issue – following all the points covered in the five-step strategy described above.

Steve Grace
CEO – Tcident

If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.