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What motivates you?

RECRUITING staff is one thing, but keeping them is something else.

Here, Paul Preston, Managing Director of Active Resourcing in Milton Keynes, looks at some of the things people can do to keep their most precious assets happy and working hard as part of a productive team.

What is it, exactly, that motivates people? Money? Prestige? A key to the executive wash room? Frankly, I doubt whether any of them individually work very well or for very long. Yes, we all need money. We have to feed and house ourselves and our families and most people want to enjoy a lifestyle that allows some luxury, but beyond the basic needs of survival, it's the 'desire' for money that is the motivator, not the cash itself.

And why do we desire money? In the short term, if we've never had much money before, it may initially be for material possessions that we think show status and success, but in the longer term I don't really think it's so we

can fuel our consumer society. It's much more likely that we crave the recognition of a job well done that an unexpected rise in salary implies. We all want to be appreciated, to know that we are contributing and that we are considered to be an important member of the team. A hike in salary says that - but it's the thought that counts!

What, for example, is likely to be the greater motivator, a 20% increase that the employee has had to wait for, fight for and threaten to leave for, or a 5% increase given freely when it wasn't expected?

What's more romantic - a big bunch of expensive roses on your wife's birthday (just like you get her every year), or a bunch of daisies collected from the garden for no reason at all? What's more, small increases can be given often, multiplying the motivational effect.

But there's more to life than money. The biggest motivator of all time must be recognition and appreciation and the simple words 'Thank You', that so

many employers forget. Yes, good business is a fair trade, the employer employs, the workers work, at the end of the week all's square.

But just saying 'Thank you, I really appreciate all you have done this week. Well done!' is more powerful than a few extra pounds bonus. Both would be better of course!

There are lots more things that employers can do to attract, motivate and retain the very best people.

Here's a short list:

- Be flexible. Allow people the time they need to live their lives. If they need to leave a few minutes early, why not. The time will come, when the big order comes in, that the time can be repaid.
- Remember a birthday.
- Buy something thoughtful at Christmas
- Give a small gift for no particular reason.
- Write a personal letter to your team.
- Include employees in major decisions, get their input and ideas.

- Reward people with responsibility.
- Delegate some good/exciting tasks, not just the ones you don't want.
- Take staff to visit clients.
- Take people out for lunch occasionally.
- Include some overseas travel if possible.
- Map a career path and show how you are working to help them achieve it.
- Allow their job to evolve to match their talents and interests.

The list could go on for pages. The important message is that staff motivation doesn't have to be expensive.

If you treat people well and show them that they are valued, money is of less importance. If you don't, high wages is the only tool you have left.

Remember too, something small given freely and unexpectedly is more powerful than something large given under pressure.

I think it's best to get in early with the daisies rather than last minute clutching the roses.

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