30 Ways to Maximize Employee Productivity

Robert Half®
Introduction

No one needs to be told how important productivity is for prosperity — and perhaps survival — in business today. Most companies are constantly looking for ways to improve job performance. With more than 65 years of experience working with businesses, we can appreciate the value of achieving maximum productivity from your employees.

What you’ll find in 30 Ways to Maximize Employee Productivity is a variety of valuable ideas on how to better utilize your most important resources: the people who work for you. The ideas touch upon many different aspects of the work experience. While not all the suggestions may be relevant to your particular company, all have proven successful in one situation or another, and most are ideas you can easily incorporate into your day-to-day operations.

Sincerely,

Max Messmer
Chairman and CEO
30 Ways to Maximize Employee Productivity

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1. Humanize the Work Environment

People work harder and more effectively in an employee-friendly work environment, one in which management recognizes and respects the need to treat each employee as an individual. Here are some of the basic elements of a healthy workplace:

- Comfortable working conditions
- Salaries and benefits that are comparable to or better than what other companies offer
- Open communication between management and employees
- Advancement opportunities
- A clear commitment to basic courtesy

2. Hire Smart

Take the time — and effort — to recruit and hire the best possible person for each job opening in your company. When you’re considering candidates, focus on past accomplishments rather than credentials only. Pay more attention to what the candidates achieved in their last positions, and focus less on the positions’ functions. One more thing: When you’re considering new employees, don’t overlook such basic virtues as loyalty and reliability.

Ask for our guide, Hiring the Best People, for valuable tips on hiring good employees.

3. Use Strategic Staffing

There’s a fine line between having too much work and not enough. Most people tend to use their time more efficiently when they’re busy than when they have idle time on their hands. So, before you staff an open position or add to your full-time staff, make sure that current employees can’t assume additional responsibilities. Or consider hiring a temporary employee so that you can determine whether you need someone full time.

4. Spell Out Objectives

One of the most common and frequently overlooked reasons behind subpar performance is poor direction. When you issue an assignment, spell out as many details as you can. Keep in mind that many employees are embarrassed to ask questions for fear of appearing incompetent.
5. **Be Consistent**

Within reason and without being rigid, be consistent in your general management approach. True, you need to customize your supervisory style for each individual, but make sure the rules and regulations that apply to one person apply to everyone else in a comparable position.

6. **Set the Proper Example**

The old adage “Do what I say, not what I do” doesn’t work well in business. Managers should exemplify the standards employees are expected to adhere to, especially in such areas as punctuality, appearance, courtesy to fellow employees and willingness to work overtime when the need arises. Few things will motivate employees more than seeing the boss pitch in on routine tasks when the pressure is on. Conversely, don’t ask an employee to do anything you wouldn’t do.

7. **Encourage Employee Input and Risk Taking**

Never assume that your employees will voluntarily express their concerns. Instead, actively seek comments, observations and suggestions. To do this, you’ll have to do more than install a suggestion box. Be sure you maintain an open-door policy that makes it easy for staff to talk to you, and always try to address employees’ concerns immediately.

Remember to reward risk taking as well as results. Give your employees enough latitude to achieve their full potential.

8. **Publicize Company Goals**

Your employees should know what goals (both short- and long-term) your company is striving for. Spotlight these ambitions in company publications, on the employee bulletin board or on posters. Encourage individual departments to set objectives and involve employees in the process.

9. **Develop Career Paths**

Just as it is important for your company to have objectives, your individual employees need to have personal career goals as well. Advancement opportunities can be a powerful way to motivate your staff. Investing a small amount of time to discuss potential career paths with each employee can yield large dividends in productivity as well as job satisfaction.
10. Promote From Within

With rare exceptions, the policy of most successful companies is to promote from within. This isn’t to say that you shouldn’t bring in an outsider, depending on the job and individuals involved, but the issue here is one of policy. Promoting from within builds morale and also simplifies your hiring procedures.

11. Show a Personal Interest in the People Who Work for You

Make sure you know enough about the lives of your staff members to relate to them on a personal level. Without prying, learn about their hobbies and interests. Show appropriate concern and compassion when an employee, or someone in his or her family, is going through a personal crisis.

When you really get to know your employees, you’ll be able to identify what motivates each individual on your team and develop a more effective system of incentives and rewards for your department.

12. Vary Rewards

People perform better when their efforts are recognized — but rewards do not necessarily have to be financial. Extra days off, praise in company publications and the opportunity to broaden job responsibilities are just three examples of nonfinancial rewards.

13. Use a ‘Carrot,’ Not a ‘Stick,’ to Motivate

Fear of repercussions never results in good performance over the long term. If you run your department by constantly assigning blame and criticizing workers, your employees won’t stick around for long. And you’re certainly not fostering open communication and teamwork, which are key to maximizing productivity.

14. Be Liberal With Praise

Compliment employees whenever it’s warranted, and don’t worry about making them complacent by overpraising. Most people respond to praise by working harder. On the other hand, people who work hard but feel unappreciated are likely to cut back on their efforts, figuring that management doesn’t care.
15. Delegate Effectively
It’s one thing to issue an assignment and another to allow the person true responsibility for its successful execution. When you delegate, there is always some risk that the employee won’t do the assignment exactly the way you want or, worse, may delegate all the decisions back to you. But unless you’re willing to take this risk, you’ll never maximize employee productivity.

16. Put ‘Stretch’ Into Assignments
Encourage staff members to go beyond their comfort zones in taking on new responsibilities and projects. While you want to make sure such initiatives are manageable, they also should help employees build their skills and expertise. The new challenge also will demonstrate your faith in them and motivate them to perform at a higher level.

17. Don’t Whitewash Unpleasant Assignments
Accept the fact that not all projects your employees are expected to perform will be pleasant for them. When you have to give difficult assignments, prepare your employees in advance and don’t minimize the scope of the task. Consider, too, the possibility of bringing in temporary professionals to ease the burden of time-consuming projects.

18. Hold Meetings Only When Necessary
It’s been said that a company’s success is inversely proportional to the number of meetings it holds. Before calling a formal meeting, make sure it’s really needed. The rule is simple: Hold a meeting only when there are issues of substance to discuss.

Equally important, keep meetings brief and to the point. An agenda helps to keep people from wandering off the topic of discussion. Also, set a time limit for each meeting.
19. Remember That Time Is Money

Effective time management is essential for maintaining peak levels of productivity. Simply put, you need to make sure that your employees are not only working hard but also working smart — getting the maximum results from the time and energy they spend on specific tasks.

Encourage your staff to plan ahead for each day so they know which projects take priority. Avoid scheduling department meetings in the middle of the day so that you are less likely to disrupt workflow, and try to consolidate similar projects whenever possible.

20. Individualize Responsibility

The more people share responsibilities on a particular assignment, the longer they will take to complete the project. Group effort is an important dynamic in business, but make sure the individuals within the group have clearly defined responsibilities.


Many companies become aware of trouble only after problems with productivity reach major proportions. To prevent this, be alert to the early symptoms:

- Sharp rise in absenteeism
- Significant increase in employee complaints
- Noticeable decline in the appearance of the office
- Breakdowns in discipline
- Sudden and substantial rise or decline in the amount of communication between employees and management

22. Don’t Take Training Programs for Granted

Make sure the people who conduct your training understand the differences between demonstrating a skill and teaching that skill to someone learning it for the first time. Also, be certain to customize your activities to the ability levels of the people being trained.

As the need for specialized skills increases, training your employees through either internal or external sources will become an even greater necessity.
23. Hold Off-Site Events

Try to hold regular training or planning events off-site, even if only once a year. Different surroundings can help spawn new ideas and provide a break from routine. Allow for some social time in the agenda; it can help your department develop a spirit of teamwork.

24. Take Note of Poor Performers

Be alert to signs that a staff member lacks motivation or is unhappy in his or her job, such as a sharp rise in absenteeism or missed deadlines. Speak directly to the individual and try to determine the underlying reason. If there is no change in the behavior after an established period, it might be in everyone’s best interest to let the employee go before the department’s overall performance suffers.

25. Tell the Truth

Productivity rarely flourishes in an atmosphere plagued by rumors and distrust. Keep your employees informed of any issues that could conceivably affect them (they’re going to find out anyway). Establish management and employee discussion groups in which staff have the opportunity to express their own concerns and views on company issues.

26. Criticize Constructively

When employees are doing a substandard job, let them know, but do it with care and tact. First of all, never criticize an employee in front of his or her coworkers. And second, to take the sting out of the criticism, focus the discussion on performance, not the person.

27. Say ‘No’ Tactfully

Whenever you decline an employee’s request — whether it’s for a raise, a day off or a change in working conditions — make sure that the way you refuse it doesn’t alienate the individual more than the refusal itself. Always give an explanation for your decision and be careful to phrase it so as not to embarrass the employee.
28. Implement a Formal Performance Review Process

A formal review process is important for you and your employees. Most companies hold formal evaluations on an annual basis, but consider touching base with individuals in your department quarterly or every six months. These assessments ensure that both you and your employees are aware of performance expectations and can help you determine objectively if those goals are being met. Be sure to keep a record of each review. Documentation will be important when making decisions about pay increases or promotions, for example.

29. Learn From Employees Who Quit

An exit interview with a staff member who leaves can give you insight into company problems that you may not be able to get elsewhere. The exit interview should be conducted by the highest-level manager who had contact with that particular employee. But remember, the departing employee may not be entirely objective, so take this into account in your assessment of his or her comments.

30. Admit Your Mistakes

When you make a mistake, don’t try to conceal it from your employees. You’ll only encourage them to hide their errors. Remember, nobody expects perfection — even from the boss.
About the Company

Founded in 1948, Robert Half is the world’s first and largest specialized staffing firm, with seven professional staffing divisions: Accountemps®, Robert Half® Finance & Accounting and Robert Half® Management Resources, for temporary, full-time and senior-level project professionals, respectively, in the fields of accounting and finance; OfficeTeam®, for highly skilled office and administrative support professionals; Robert Half® Technology, for information technology professionals; Robert Half® Legal, for temporary, project and full-time staffing of attorneys, paralegals and legal support personnel; and The Creative Group®, for interactive, design, marketing, advertising and public relations professionals. Robert Half has more than 340 staffing locations worldwide and once again was named to FORTUNE® magazine’s list of “World’s Most Admired Companies” (March 17, 2014).

Chairman and CEO Max Messmer is a widely published author and columnist on management-related issues. His books include Human Resources Kit For Dummies®, 3rd edition; Motivating Employees For Dummies®; and The Fast Forward MBA in Hiring® (all published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

To learn more about our professional services and resources, please contact your local office by calling 1.800.803.8367 or visit our website at roberthalf.com.

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