

Three Ways to Make Initiative Flourish

Initiative — that magic quality that constitutes the difference between an employee who works for his paycheck and an employee who works for his company. Here are three time-tested methods for cultivating initiative in your employees:

1. **Don't supervise them too closely.** Subordinates with initiative will respond better, perform better, grow faster and gain more job satisfaction if they get general direction rather than minutely detailed instructions by eagle-eyed bosses. Give your employees a number of short-range objectives and give them free rein to achieve these objectives in their own way.

But don't make a common mistake by treating all the objectives alike. Every job, without exception, has its crucial components and those that are less than crucial. Let your subordinates know what is the most important to you. And even if you do make clear what objectives are priorities, it won't be enough unless you also provide frequent updates. Remember that department and company goals are constantly changing and the employee who is kept apprised will contribute the most to his company.

2. **Don't blind yourself to their potential for growth.** Managers are sometimes too preoccupied with their own development opportunities to worry about finding opportunities for their subordinates. In some cases, this may be because the manager is afraid of competition. One thing is certain, though. If a manager is so worried about his own chances of moving up that he doesn't let those below him do anything challenging, he will wind up so busy, so ineffectual, that he will draw negative attention to himself — hardly his intent.

3. **Don't forget that you are as accountable to your employees as they are to you.** Picture these examples:

- You go looking for your boss to tell him of an angrily complaining client — one of the biggest your firm has. Your boss isn't there. **He went off on a three-day weekend.**

- You ask a staff member for a comprehensive report involving a lot of work and when you get it fail to even acknowledge its receipt, let alone how useful it was.

- You call a meeting on a critical subject, ask staff members for views and suggestions, and then after that day never refer to the subject again.

These lapses of communication are easy to dismiss as instances in which someone just didn't have the time to brief everyone involved, or just didn't think it was important enough. But they give subordinates the feeling that they are not part of the company, and a feeling of belonging is a crucial ingredient to fostering initiative.

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Tips for Motivating Employees without Raising Salaries

When business is booming, company owners can afford to be generous with raises. The challenge, according to Donald J. Fletcher, president of the management consulting firm of George S. May International Co., lies in creating motivational rewards when budgets are tight.

Fletcher offers the following tips for motivating your work force when money is scarce:

- **Be flexible** -- The long-term employee who wants stock options doesn't have the same concerns as the new parent, who would be happier and more productive with more time off or a flexible schedule.
- **Provide positive feedback** -- Don't talk to your employees only when there's a problem. Give them a public pat on the back for a job well done so they'll keep up the good work and others will see that you appreciate extra effort. And do it in person -- it sends a much stronger message.
- **Ask the experts** -- Your employees often know more about parts of your company than you do. Solicit their input on how to improve the company, and reward them if their ideas result in savings.
- **Share the wealth** -- Give your employees the incentive to perform better. If they know they'll receive bonuses when profits rise, they'll work that much harder.
- **Be part of the team** -- Promote from within whenever possible, and help employees gain the necessary skills to advance. Your employees will be more productive if you demonstrate that you're on their side.



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