

Motivating remotely to drive performance

From Apr 2020 article written by *The GroGroup*

We have been spending a lot of time over the last few weeks talking to clients and other organisations; there now seems to be a shift from 'Phase 1' to 'Phase 2' thinking. **Phase 1 was dealing with the immediate challenges** of the major changes forced by the Covid-19 situation, ensuring people were able to work from home, understanding and making decisions on furloughing and generally reacting to, and coping with, immediate concerns. The people focus was on communication, inclusion, care and well-being. Conversations tended to be along the lines of:

'How are you?'

'Have you got everything you need?'

'What can I do to support you?'

Phase 2 is about moving forwards. It is vital that there is a continued focus on well-being, and leaders are now wanting to ensure their teams and people are focused on performance and contribution. For the vast majority of organisations these are very tough times indeed and they need everybody pulling in the right direction, taking the initiative and driving outcomes.

Clients are focused upon the need for:

Clear communication about immediate and medium-term strategy and business priorities

Leaders and managers to clearly communicate desired outcomes and goals to teams

Clear performance objectives

Regular check-ins and monitoring

Debriefs, reviews and feedback

One thing that has come up frequently is the difficulty in motivating teams under the current emotionally distressing circumstances – and with the added challenge of remoteness.

Let's make one thing clear: a leader cannot 'motivate' another person. Motivation is a personal choice, a personal decision. A leader is responsible for doing what they can to understand what motivates an individual, then create the right environment to make it easy for the individual to choose to be motivated. You can lead a horse to water....

So, the question is, how can you create those motivational environments? Tony Robbins speaks of 'motivational drivers', the six invisible forces that humans need and which drive people to do the things they do. Usually, when developing leadership behaviours we focus on this at a micro level – understanding what helps to drive individuals and creating approaches to enable them to 'get it', to push performance. There are also things that organisations and leaders can do on a macro level to ensure that most needs are met, and everyone is able to get motivated of their own accord:

Certainty: (a need for security / knowing the outcome / routine)

Right now this is difficult with so many unknowns. Could you do more to provide some sense of certainty, foundations, control? Can you reinforce priorities, communicate that you're planning for different scenarios in the short, medium and longer term? What are the clear priorities to focus on, what does the week ahead look like? Sharing what is a possibility helps put things in perspective.

Significance (the need to feel special, important, to make a name, be high profile)

It is essential to be clear, with outcomes and measures, to enable people to drive and achieve – and follow through with usual recognition practices. A call, text or email to show that you noticed is important. A private or public thank-you, supporting individuals with LinkedIn / media articles and posts can all help.

Connection (the need to fit in / relationships / part of a team)

The amount of Zoom, Skype, Hangouts and MS Teams calls that are happening at all levels is really helping here. Seek to create connection opportunities across wider teams and bring different groups together – and ensure that regular one-on-ones are still happening, as close connection is key.

Contribution (the need to give / to help / to be part of something bigger)

It is essential for organisations and leaders to provide some clarity about what the business is wanting to achieve, the position it needs to be in by a certain time, the current vision to help their clients – to enable people to understand what and how they can contribute. Feedback, reflection and confirmation of effort and outcomes are hugely important.

Growth (the need to learn / to improve / to develop)

It is easy to think of Learning & Development as non-essential in the current situation, but teams and individuals always need opportunities to learn, grow and improve. In a recent survey of 700+ firms globally, it was heartening that 80% of organisations will continue to invest in virtual development, coaching and mentoring and look for opportunities to bring individuals into projects and initiatives.

Change (the need for 'new' / flexibility / being unplanned)

There is no doubt that anyone who needs change and has a thirst for 'newness' doesn't currently need to look very far to find this. There are going to be people who are actually feeling exceptionally driven right now, have real clarity and are spotting opportunities. The key is to identify and leverage the ideas and activity from these people. How can you involve them in planning? How can you capture their ideas and utilise their ability to innovate?

Summary

Leaders need to focus on performance and driving outcomes to protect business interests in the short term, and be in position to take opportunities when we emerge from the current crisis. Ensuring that teams and individuals have some form of certainty, significance, connection, contribution, growth and change to align with their personal preferred motivational drivers can have a significant effect on performance and engagement.