Focus On: 8 Ideas to Revitalize Your Team's Morale and Productivity

People or profits? Results or relationships? Safety or Savings? As supervisors we often feel an enormous amount of pressure (spoken or unspoken) to make these types of difficult decisions. We also feel a great deal of conflict as well over the choices we make.

In their article *8 Ways to Revitalize Your Team's Morale and Productivity*, Karin Hurt and David Dye offer this advice:

"You don't have to choose between results and relationships. In fact, the most effective leaders ground themselves in internal values of confidence and humility while focused on both results and relationships. The key to what we call "winning well"—that is, sustaining excellent results over time—is to combine a focus on achieving results with building healthy professional relationships."

The following is a summary of their eight ways to boost morale AND productivity.

1 Rock Your Role

Your team's morale and performance begin with you. Can they look at you and see the excellence you're asking of them? It's hard to bring your A game 100 percent of the time, but the most effective leaders show up to play every day.

If you want to rock your role, don't keep doing what you've always done. It's about progress, not perfection. Hone your craft. Read what the experts are saying about the future in your field. Find a mentor or two who have skills you admire. Invest in a leadership development program for you and your team.

2 Mind the M.I.T.

In our experience, the number one cause of poor morale,

performance problems and subpar results is a lack of clarity. You can boost morale and productivity by communicating clear, shared expectations. This is where your Toastmasters training can pay off.

One way to make sure everyone is on the same page is to “Mind the M.I.T.” (Most Important Thing). Be sure to prioritize. What is the most important thing your team can achieve this year? This quarter? This week? What is the most important thing they can do today? Does everyone on the team know what “winning” looks like?

3 Ditch the Diaper Drama

Your team needs direct feedback that will help them know what to continue and what to change. However, most leaders struggle to give direct feedback. Gallup recently reported that less than one in four employees said their manager provides meaningful feedback. We’ve observed many leaders who struggle to give direct feedback in a way that helps their employees. Like stinky diapers wrapped with plastic in the modern-day diaper pail, they wrap their feedback in layers of self-protection, so it doesn’t offend anyone.

When giving speech evaluations, Toastmasters learn to strike the balance between positive feedback and constructive criticism. They encourage the speaker, but they also point out what needs to be improved. Effective leaders speak the truth. Improve your team’s morale and productivity by having the tough conversations using the INSPIRE feedback model (see sidebar) and speak truth with compassion.

4 Channel Challengers

“No one listens around here, they don’t know what I do, and they don’t care what I think.” These are the signature words of ineffective leaders. In contrast, effective leaders recognize the value every person on their team contributes. They deliberately surround themselves with people who will challenge their thinking.

It’s not enough to have an “open door policy” and passively wait for people to tell you what you need to hear. Instead, seek out

feedback. Ask your team, “What is working to help you be productive?” Then ask, “As your leader, what is one thing I could do that would help you be more productive at your work?” Listen, respond and watch your team’s morale and performance soar.

5 Own the Ugly

Many leaders won’t take responsibility for their mistakes. They fear that apologizing makes them look weak or lose credibility. In fact, the opposite is true.

When you make a mistake or hurt someone, it’s not a secret. Your team knows and they’re watching to see what you do. Can they trust you to own it? Apologize, make it right and move on. Your people will trust you, they’ll more likely take responsibility themselves and morale will improve.

6 Play the Game, Don’t Game the Score

To maximize your team’s morale and productivity, keep them focused on what matters most. Your customer doesn’t care what you get on your “scorecard.” They care about the value you deliver. Isolate the key behaviors that truly drive the value you contribute to your clients, customers and members.

Reinforce these critical actions every day and the score will take care of itself. Above all else, don’t let your team ‘game the score’—that is, don’t waste time trying to artificially adjust measurements.

7 Put People Before Projects

Productive teams enjoy high levels of trust, connection and collaboration. Collaboration is more than simply working together; it’s an attitude that communicates you are in it with your people, not apart from them.

A great employee experience, or a rewarding member experience in Toastmasters, starts as you recognize the unique strengths and perspectives each person brings to the team. Take the time to look at a person’s potential to perform beyond her current role. Build

trust with, and between, your people. Listen to what is important to them and encourage their success.

8 Trust the Trenches

In your employees and volunteers, you have a tremendous source of product knowledge, insights into customers and performance improvements. Listen to what they have to say. They may not know how valuable their observations can be. Help them learn how to recognize the opportunities, celebrate their success and give them the credit when their ideas work.

Your people are your number one competitive advantage. When you consistently practice these eight behaviors, you'll see your team's morale improve and their productivity increase. That's not just winning—that's winning well.

Karin Hurt and David Dye *are authors of* Winning Well: A Manager's Guide to Getting Results Without Losing Your Soul *and the CEO and president of Let's Grow Leaders. David was a featured speaker at the 2017 Toastmasters International Convention in Vancouver, Canada.*