

How to Sustain Morale After Layoffs

By PI Worldwide

One of the dangers of downsizing an organization is shifting employees into new and uncertain roles. It's tempting for managers to reassign the work of terminated employees to those closest to them. But a manager's job after a layoff is to improve performance by increasing the energy, focus and morale of those that remain. This requires shifting people into positions that match their skills and strengths, rather than forcing them into roles where they are less likely to succeed.

The cyclical nature of the economy mandates that companies think long-term, as well as short-term, when trying to boost morale and productivity. Businesses should be identifying, grooming and incentivizing those employees showing promise as future leaders or as outstanding contributors. This requires genuinely understanding their needs, motives and talents. Not every gifted engineer, for example, has people management skills. Burdening your most talented developers with unwanted supervisory responsibilities can drag down team spirit and impede corporate momentum.

Managers seeking to identify and cultivate employee talents—and match the right people with the right jobs—should make sure they are putting employees in charge of their own success. Employees who are empowered to manage their growth and achievement are likely to be more self-satisfied, cooperative and proactive in solving problems. They are also more likely to remain loyal—maximizing efficiency and saving employers hundreds of thousands of dollars in continuous rehiring and retraining costs.

Research has identified best practices for giving employees a clear sense of their professional strengths—enabling them to identify the right positions for themselves, and to continuously improve on-the-job performance. Following are several proven guidelines:

Understand and underutilized assets. Many employees don't have a clear sense of the multitude of assets and leadership qualities they possess; acquired and refined through life experience. Perhaps they have coached an athletic team or managed a community fund-raising drive—roles that have contributed to their leadership skills. By identifying these roles and sharing them with their managers, employees broaden their view of their competencies and manages better understand what motivates them naturally, and areas where they can continue to grow and develop.

Complete fit/gap analyses. Employees need to be aware of how their personal and professional assets match the requirements of a particular job. While most people are aware they have the competencies they were hired for, they often lack a clear sense of how their behavioral styles may be short-circuiting their growth or impacting personal relationships. For instance, a person who is exceptionally sensitive to interruptions, and who is more focused on perfecting source code than meeting team goals, will likely gain more satisfaction from a promotion to senior developer than a team management position. Employees and their managers should work together to realistically uncover fits

and gaps—ensuring that individuals have opportunities for ongoing recognition, but in roles where they are most likely to remain engaged and grow.

Analyze critical relationship patterns. Employees must be able to foster and maintain successful relationships with key people—supervisors, direct reports, and customers. Employees who clearly recognize and understand how their behaviors mesh with the styles of these “key connections” are better able to develop strategies to compensate, improve compatibility, and maximize productivity in newly assigned positions. Managers who focus on these relationships will be more successful in assigning individuals to the roles where they are more likely to contribute personally and as a member or leader of a team.

Employees should evaluate their fit with the company culture. Cultural indicators include the manner in which decisions are made; style and format of internal communications; and the organizational pace and work ethic. An effective strategy for managers is to have employees describe their company’s culture on paper, and then compare it to an example of an environment in which they know they perform best.

Take action. Employees and their managers should develop action plans for personal and organizational success. They empower employees to identify and leverage their strengths, avoid positions requiring behavioral styles that they lack, and to bridge critical gaps through training and coaching. These plans also enable managers to place employees in roles where they can be most effective and enable their organizations to succeed in an ever changing global market.