

Boosting Morale



Why It's Important

By Orlando Blake

TODAY'S COMPETITIVE CONDITIONS REQUIRE INCREASED emphasis on lowering production and distribution costs, bettering the quality of products; and improving sales efforts and sales service. In my opinion, the extent to which any business may be successful in accomplishing these aims is largely dependent on the degree of willing cooperation between employees and management.

The signs are becoming increasingly clear that competition is and will continue to be more intense than at any time since the start of World War II. These increasingly competitive attitudes are now showing up in the acts and statements of intentions of businessmen.

To succeed in today's and tomorrow's competitive struggle, all of the tools in the kit of competition will be used. Some will use these tools with outstanding success. In each instance, the responsibility for good results, or lack of them, will be that of people—the managers and other employees of the competing firms.

Of two businesses that are equal in nearly all respects, the one that will be the more successful will be the one with

the higher employee and organization morale. This is so because, in business:

- High morale generates thinking and planning.
- High morale stimulates initiative and aggressiveness.
- High morale thrives only in an atmosphere of efficiency.
- High morale creates the urge and the means for success.
- High morale pays off in earnings and job satisfaction to employees, and in profits, dividends, and investment growth to business owners.

Two major classifications of morale building are measures largely related to very human, personal, and largely emotional reactions, such as the following:

- Providing prestige and recognition of the individuals.
- Promoting understanding of what is going on.
- Permitting employee's participation in decisions affecting them.

• Developing pride in the company

The other major classification includes measures related



mainly to job and work reactions, such as:

- Providing pleasant job surroundings.
- Organizing a smooth, efficient flow of work.
- Permitting employees freedom to exercise reasonable initiative.
- Providing opportunity for employees to progress in their work.
- Ensuring security against unexplained and arbitrary actions.
- Developing respect for and confidence in management.

THE EMPLOYEE'S POINT OF VIEW

These stated measures are likely to mean different things to different people, depending on their viewpoint. Until we analyze these moral-building measures from the point of view of the employee and not from what we think is the employee's point of view, we may fail by a wide margin to obtain full benefits.

Moreover, there must be a genuine belief on the part of all levels of management in the essential human dignity of each employee. This feeling must exist at the very top and be the creed and practice of all levels of management down to the non-supervisory employee.

Those who have given the most study and thought to morale building generally agree that wherever high morale is found to exist in a business organization, most or all of the measures which have been named are found in greater or lesser degree.

It is significant, that the list contains no mention of the level of pay, the presence or absence of pension, hospitalization and surgical, sickness and accident, or life insurance programs; nor of vacation plans, paid holidays, night shift bonuses, seniority or grievance provisions; nor of many other pay and conditions of work measures that seem to dominate in union negotiations and individual vocal complaints.

This is not to imply that such things are unimportant, alone they fall short of providing the personal, human satisfactions that must be the real substance of an aggressive, positive and successful mo-

rale building program. Many companies in any given line can be equal with respect to wages, hours of work, and working conditions, yet one or two will lead the pack on results. The difference will most often be found to line in the area of employee and management morale.

LONG FOR PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND RECOGNITIONS

Every employee being human longs for a measure of personal prestige and recognition, either for the quality or quantity of his or her work, or for some special attributes he or she may possess. While each manager would like a full complement of employees who can be given recognition for



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their work, there are many other areas where such recognition can also be developed. Does the employee have a good attendance record? Is he/she punctual in getting on the job and starting his/her day? Has he/she made a good suggestion? If so, brag to him right to his/her face so that he/she can hear and get satisfaction.

Some of us have lived through at least two widely publicized college crazes; the gold-fish eating rage of the 1950's and the dormitory panty raids of the 1960's. Has it occurred to us that a vague desire for personal prestige and recognition must have motivated many of the perpetrators of these daring deeds?

Many of these modern day adventurers are now somebody's employees and they still have the same desire to be noticed and recognized. They want to be respected by their fellow employee's, neighbors, and community associates but most of all they want the recognition of their supervisors. This places a powerful tool for constructive employee development in the hands of every supervisor—and imposes the heavy responsibility of seeing to it that every employee worth saving is given full and frequent recognition for his/her good qualities, good work, and any special noteworthy attributes he/she may possess. Each supervisor is his/her own builder, or destroyer of the prestige and recognition needs of his/her employee group.

NEED FOR EMPLOYEE UNDERSTANDING

Promoting understanding of the main currents flowing within the organization, by means of reasonable explanations of the "What's", and some knowledge of the "Why's", is another must of a good morale building program. Though some organization matters have to remain confidential, many upsetting events do not.

An often-sung refrain in the employee repertoire is "Why in the world doesn't the company do this?" One varia-

tion on the theme is "Why in the world did the company do that?" Another is "Why in the world did the company do what it did do in the way that it did?"

Many, many times such questions can be answered without the least violation of company security. In most instances, there are simple answers to be given that are easily understood and readily accepted. To whom should each employee look for this understanding he/she desires and needs, if he/she is the kind of employee the company wants to retain? To his/her immediate supervisor, that's who!

Plainly, the satisfaction of this employee desire and need involves the whole system of company communication and



Every employee longs for a measure of personal prestige and recognition.

its effectiveness. It is clearly a responsibility of upper management to make available to all management levels the information and understanding they have if they are satisfactorily to fulfill their employee's needs. But, with this done, it is only the supervisor of each employee group who can get the job done properly with those reporting to him/her. The chain of intra-company communication can have no weak links.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS

Permitting and encouraging some employee participation in decisions affecting them is an essential step in the stairway toward high company morale. It is clear that, in any organization, there must be a seat of authority. As organizations grow in size, authority must usually be decentralized for effective functioning, with each manager knowing the extent and limits of his/her responsibility and authority.

Employee participation in decisions affecting them does not mean, and cannot mean, the sharing with employees of management responsibility and control. Rather it means before decisions vitally affecting employees are reached a conscious organization process of explaining problems to employees, seeking their opinions, and weighing their suggestions and views.



It also involves, when decisions are taken, a responsibility to explain the nature of the decision and to impart, a reasonable understanding of the whys. This is a two-way communication at its best; and only that mainstay, the departmental supervisor or foreman can effectively carry it out, with any group of employees.

PRIDE IN THE COMPANY

We have all talked lately with those who are proud of the company for which they work. And we all can recall talking with someone who feels no such pride. By comparing these two groups, we have convincing evidence of what pride of company can do to elevate or depress the spirit and outlook of people. In West Berlin some years ago, a chauffeur who was making 60 marks a week, was asked why he did not move to Western Germany where he could well make 75 to 80 marks a week.

His reply was direct and to the point: "Sir, I am a Berliner." Pride of the city meant more to him than a higher standard of living.

Students of human nature will say, possible, that it is a natural human desire to want to be a part of a good organization. This certainly is one basis for successful team competition on the athletic field. Membership in a good organization brings with it the feeling that the individual has to be good in order to be a part of such a team. It is pleasantly stimulating to our ego and we like the satisfying feeling that goes with it.

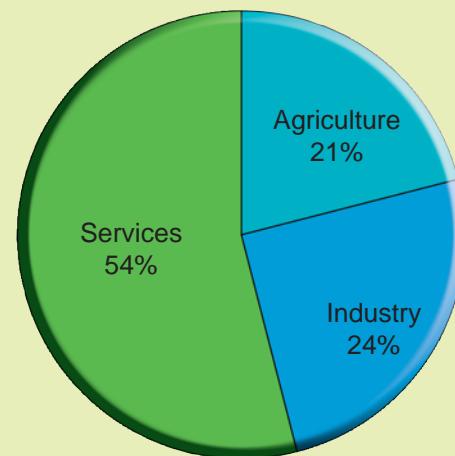
And so it is with the company for which the employee works. If it has products of quality, if its research accomplishments are outstanding, if its earnings are growing, if its public and community relations are approved, the employee will have pride in being a part of such an organization and will feel proud of him or herself for having earned a continuing association with a company of this caliber.

Such pride must obviously be based on the reality of the company's reputation. It must have grown from the whole complex of company performance in the past and now. But, given the conditions that make such company pride possible, who is the man or woman who can make it really effective in playing its part in the development of high organization morale. Again, for each and every group of employees the answer is the supervisor.

The full potential of each employee can be realized, and job morale lifted in an atmosphere of freedom of initiatives. Whether initiative thrives, or lies dormant, depends again, in any employee group, on that key figure, the supervisor.

Related to the need for freedom of initiative is the element of employee opportunity to use their full abilities, to

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advance in responsibility and pay wherever possible on their present jobs, and to have an equal, impartial chance with others for higher jobs that open up.

The presence of such opportunity doesn't mean that every employee will use his/her full abilities, or will advance on his present job, or will be promoted. It does mean that the history of employee encouragement and progress within the department, division, or company has been such that employees readily recognize the continued presence of opportunity for those who have the ability and the will to advance. Such a history can be built, with reference to any employee group, only through the continued assurances and the continued constructive action of the person who can make such an objective become a reality that is the supervisor or foreman.

THE IMPACT OF ARBITRARY CHANGES

Employee and organization morale are also affected by the existence or absence of a feeling of security against sudden and seemingly arbitrary changes in their work situations or in their positions within the organization. This requires pre-planning, pre-discussion, and advance warning, always with reasons why -when actions must be taken.

It is a different kind of security from that usually meant by the term job security. Demotions, lay-offs, and discharge are necessary at times, and will be understood and accepted by the employee group —and without injury to their feeling of security —if they are properly handled.

But what reaction would you expect from employee John Doe if he is taken from his regular job and placed in another without warning or explanation? Or from Janie Doe who has been the victim of a sudden, unexpected (to her) change in work schedules? Or from John Jones who has reported for work only to find his machine removed overnight,

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without foreknowing on his part?

Such thoughtless actions are most liable to generate thoughtless reactions, and lead to low morale and consequences that are demoralizing. While much of industry is achieving good results in providing what is ordinarily termed job security, it is more likely than not doing poorly in providing the security of mind that is the essence of this phase of industry's morale problem. Upper management may desire it, and company policy may encourage it, but such personal security of mind can be developed and made real, with any group of employees, only as their supervisors work to make it so.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS MANAGEMENT

Finally, good organization and employee morale develops and thrives only when there is respect for and confidence in management at all levels. Such respect and confidence must be earned by supervisors as individual human beings, and must grow from their fairness and consistency, from their demonstrated interest in employee progress, and from their constant willingness to listen to and understand employee problems.

Proper management convictions and attention to the

measures promoting high morale, as outlined herein, will go far toward creating the conditions of respect and confidence that are essential. Repeated action along these lines, knowledge of which is passed on at lightning speed by the organization grapevine, will be almost certain to generate the desired employee attitudes toward management.

Management, to any group of employee's is most generally known in terms of the immediate supervisor. He/She is their main management contact, their principal guarantor of management interest and action, the one to whom they must go with problems and complaints, the one who must act for them with higher management level: when the situation so requires, and the one in management from whom they must acquire the intangible, emotional values that make them feel like important individual human beings, instead of like cogs in a machine. Each supervisor is, for his/her people, the one person most responsible for their attitudes toward the management group as a whole.

THE KEY ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL BOSS

It has been stressed again and again, as we discussed the elements most commonly found to exist in high morale organizations, that the central compelling and controlling



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relationship is that of the individual employee to his/her individual boss. Though company policies and authorized practices may be poor, the right kind of supervisor can still develop reasonably good morale among his employee group. Conversely, the best of company policies and authorized practices will be of little benefit to the morale and effectiveness of an employee group with a don't know or don't care type of supervisor.

The bosses' responsibilities in this morale area are great, but his/her opportunities are also great, and the potential effectiveness and satisfactions are enormous.

At this point, it should be said that while bosses are bosses, they also are employees who are entitled to have the same opportunities, attention, and encouragement as other employees. Good supervisor morale is a fixed pre-requisite of good morale. So each supervisor along the entire management line from president down must assume the morale responsibilities for those next lower level supervisors to whom he/she is the boss.

When a supervisor at any level has had the training, the opportunity and the encouragement to perform well, and has failed to do so, the time has come for a change. As men are known by the company they keep, so a company is known by the men it keeps and those it drops.

PROBLEMS OF THE BOSS

Being a boss has many advantages and rewards, but it is nevertheless a hard job and often a lonely one. The landscape looks different from one level up than from the next level down. As bosses are promoted to successively higher levels, it becomes more difficult to know and understand the realities of lower level employee attitudes and feelings. Because of this, and because lower level employees are hesitant to express their views to criticize, and to make suggestions, it is incumbent on the supervisor to be conscious of his/her lack of full information, to cultivate a constructive listening habit, and to develop an almost super sensitivity to the feelings of others. Only by this means can he/she hope to nurture and develop the human touch that he/she must have if she/he is to become the better supervisor he/she desires to be.

High morale is a main requisite of success for a com-

pany and for its employee group, from sweeper to president. In large companies or small, high morale can only be built block by block, day by day, year by year, and by actions much more than by words.

The existence of high morale depends much more on human, emotional values than on physical or economic means, though the importance of these cannot be ignored. The morale officer for each group of employees is the manager to whom such employees

report. Almost regardless of company policies and procedures, the manager is the maker or breaker of the morale of his/her employee group.

At regular intervals, every supervisor should inventory him or herself to evaluate progress in the morale-building area that is directly related to the human qualities of leadership. It is only through the human qualities that the supervisor, manager, bosses, company, and its owners can be most effective and best rewarded in values both human

and economic.

So, when the score is tallied for competitive 2002, as was the case in 2001, and as it will be in 2003, the successful competitors will count among their numbers, a great proportion of those who have built and maintained a high order of individual employee morale and organization team play. Morale, while not the only key to successful competition, will have once again affirmed its position as one of the most important ones.

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