

PEOPLE AND TEAM

Find out how innovative UK SMEs are thinking differently about the way they get the most out of any company's most valuable asset – its people.



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business**

MOTIVATION

Having engaged and motivated employees requires a clear goal-setting and incentive structure. Whether it's feeling inspired by where their career is going or having the kind of work-life balance they are after, motivation must be approached on an individual basis and tailored accordingly.

Gone are the days when job security and a healthy salary were enough to find and retain the best members of staff. Workers today are more often than not looking for a role that blends both of those considerations with a mixture of purpose, autonomy, recognition and an environment that helps shape where they go in the future.

The task of motivating your people and team starts from the beginning of the recruitment process. The process of applying for a job has been democratised by the internet, putting power into the hands of applicants as they look for a role best suited to their needs.

As described in the annual "What Workers Want" report from global recruitment firm Hays, what job seekers in 2018 wanted most from employers was for them to be transparent, authentic and give the full picture. This translates into being able to clearly communicate how their personal development will be invested in, what a career path looks like and why the brand values mean something.

This carries through to providing the right kind of motivation once someone is in a role but requires a concerted effort to maintain momentum and continuity.

Top talent

Motivation, it could be argued, is most important when looking at a company's top performers. While short-term financial rewards can do part of the job, what needs to be considered if your best are to stay for the long run?



“We are very much a people business and strive hard to find out what motivates people”

Alan Walsh Chief Executive Amido

Ensuring that its high performers remain intellectually stimulated is technical consultancy Amido. “We are very much a people business and strive hard to find out what motivates people. That means offering more than table tennis and gimmicks,” explained chief executive Alan Walsh. “For us, motivation means giving employees autonomy.”

The independence at Amido stretches to only accepting work which is going to challenge its employees and boost their development. The business has even turned work down because it didn't feel that it would keep its employees fully engaged. “We get our employees involved right at the start of negotiations with a new client,” he added.

Alan went on to add that creating a strong support framework for its high-performing employees is also crucial. “We have six Amido communities that are self-governing to help our talent learn and grow through sharing experiences and knowledges with their peers,” he explained.

Opening up

Knowing that becoming better at their job, to both benefit the company and open up new routes in their future, is a key factor in job motivation influenced a creative change at Trusted Media.

The business, which has 12 employees, brought in “lunch and learn” workshops on either a Wednesday or Friday every week.

“The session is very informal,” added Dean Lynn. “The stories that staff share over lunch can be about anything from inside or outside work. Not only does this help us to learn from each other, it also helps us all learn more about each other.”

Input ranges from a new Google update to how someone’s experience of loss has changed their life. “You never know what you’re going to get. I think that’s what keeps everyone hooked,” he said.

It also cements a keen training culture at Trusted Media. “Our team does regular masterclasses on enhancing creativity, communication and embedding a mindful way of working.”

Ben Murry, head of marketing at office design group Peldon Rose, believes employers are increasingly keen to send “positive messages” to staff to combat intense competition for talent.

Offering a workplace environment which leads to happier and motivated staff, Ben outlined, is vital in this. “People spend thousands of hours of their life in an office and so need it to really work for them. We have engaged with our staff in workshops and one-to-one meetings to



“Our team does regular masterclasses on enhancing creativity, communication and embedding a mindful way of working”

Dean Lynn Trusted Media

find out what they need and want rather than what the management determines. What will make them happy and more productive?

“Employees like to be listened to not just regarding their environment but other benefits. As an employer you need to be open to ideas they bring.”



“People spend thousands of hours of their life in an office and so need it to really work for them.”

Ben Murray Peldon Rose

Three key takeaways:

1. Motivation is different for every person
2. Blend financial and cultural motivational elements
3. Make sure efforts are maintained, starting with first interaction

Three key questions:

1. Do my efforts to motivate staff reflect the diversity of my workforce?
2. When was the last time I asked my team directly what motivates them?
3. What cost-effective changes can I make to better motivate my staff?

In the next week: Ask three of your staff for a unique thing that motivates them

In the next month: Build out three or four personas that reflect the diversity you have in your workforce

In the next year: Build a motivation strategy that combines both financial and cultural elements and is driven by employee insight

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

It might sound like another piece of human resources jargon but, if done correctly, talent development can reduce a huge amount of the strain that new recruitment brings. Put simply, if you actively work at upskilling your own workforce then the operational requirements that emerge as any business matures and develops will already be looked after.

Talent management spans a big part of people and teams, but in this particular section we're going to focus on upskilling your current members of staff so they can take on extra responsibility and feel like their future is being looked after. Furthermore, implementing a talent development strategy into business operations helps map skills and ensure that there is both no gaps nor a costly surplus.

Develop within

After Optimity secured a exciting funding injection, chief executive Anthony Impey decided to train up his existing workers rather than hiring externally

Faced with the choice of recruiting new people that had the skills required for a larger company, or training up the existing team, Anthony plumped for the latter. "This was partly because it's a much lower risk way of building a business. Hiring in talent is relatively high risk because they don't know the business, they don't know the challenges that the business faces. You're much better off training and developing the team you've got."

Developing a tailor-made training and development plan gave Impey some valuable insights. "Essentially, you've got to create a training plan that meets not just the requirements of the organisation but also every individual, at different levels of their career." Optimity's solution was to create a so-called "skills metric" for every job. It then scores the team against that skills metric, so it can train them in the skills they require.



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Anthony Impey Optimity

Anthony also revealed that the company looked for external help in developing those skills metrics but found no useful resources and so “made it up as we went along”. “Building those tools from scratch has meant we’ve got a really good process now, but we could have done it much faster and we could have learned a lot more, if we could have plugged into existing resources,” he added.

Give them freedom

Talent development, especially within a smaller business, often comes in the form of giving staff greater responsibility and letting them roam outside of their day-to-day.

Ipswich-based digital marketing agency Crafted is one particular SME with an innovative management approach, recognised as one of 100 best small companies to work for by The Sunday Times, avoids pigeonholing staff by role or by tenure, background or age.

The ethos of taking an integrated approach, rather than pigeonholing staff, has paid off, according to CEO Ian Miller, who said the results of that approach regularly outperform a more siloed one and the business has never looked back. By giving staff access to new ideas, Ian believes his firm has a performance advantage in terms of quality and results of projects, as well as making for a happier and more engaged workforce.

However giving staff the chance to learn new skills or hear from others requires investment in everyone's time. Said Ian: "We must be conscious to provide the bandwidth to staff". The company does this by scheduling knowledge shares and roundtables on a regular basis. "It's much easier to schedule than try to find time for the first one," he admitted.

At hotel business Dukes Collective, MD Debrah Dhugga has always taken an active role in identifying members of the team, who she calls "family", who have the potential to go onto bigger things within the company.

"I had a fabulous lady who was a room attendant and had been identified for her social skills. She would ask questions all the time and wanted to do more, so we promoted her to floor supervisor.

"She then applied for a reception job a few years later. Despite having no experience on reception, she knew the hotel and had great customer skills so was able to do the job.

"Not everyone has every set of skills, including myself, but you can train the actual job required. We did that and she's now gone on to become guest relations manager of Dukes London, having started as a room attendant.

The lesson from Debrah is simple. "Don't just think that because someone works the kitchen they are going to work there for the rest of their life. Think flexible and think about potential opportunities."



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Debrah Dhugga MD Dukes Collect



“We must be conscious to provide the bandwidth to staff”

Ian Miller CEO Crafted

Three key takeaways:

1. Train internally rather than hire externally
2. Don't be too rigid with roles and responsibility
3. Identify the employees who could one day take on bigger roles

Three key questions:

1. Are you guilty of pigeonholing staff and not letting them develop new skills?
2. Do you have a way for employees to show or share their uncovered skills?
3. What recent new hires have you managed to fill internally?

In the next week: Think about what is more necessary in your business, training or development

In the next month: Provide at least one opportunity for each member of staff outside of their job function

In the next year: Create customised talent development plans for your workforce and let them take ownership of it

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The term performance management might sound like another piece of corporate jargon, but it simply boils down to getting the most out of your people. What structure let's a team work to its full potential and how do you make sure targets motivate in both the short and long term?

Businesses of differing sizes and industries will have contrasting approaches to this discipline, but there are some universal truths that are worth taking note of. One of these is being able to communicate the wider ambition and direction of the business.

The traditional form of performance management that most are well versed in is appraisals, those annual markers in the sand when leadership are able to give feedback to staff. However, it's at this stage that it all begins to fall over. Rather than being able to tie performance into the ambition and direction a company has, appraisals

are becoming increasingly seen as pointless and time-consuming by British workers.

A study conducted in 2018 found that only 14 per cent of respondents believe appraisals provide all the support they need to evaluate their work and plan their career development. So what can be done to avoid this stalemate.

Martini culture

In 2013 Bristol-based data analytics company Consumer Intelligence served up a new engagement scheme for its then 75 employees inspired by actress Joan Collins.



“It wasn't about allowing staff to have a few quick drinks at lunchtime but was more a working culture...”

Ian Hughes Consumer Intelligence

Three key takeaways:

1. Performance management needs to acknowledge what employees want from a job
2. Create multiple opportunities in the year for two-way feedback
3. Try and mix formal with informal conversations

Three key questions:

1. Are there any employees you think might be in the wrong job role?
2. When was the last time you updated your appraisal process?
3. Have you compared how you tackle performance management with other firms?

In the next week: Have a look at your staff retention figures for the last three years

In the next month: Focus on someone you know is underperforming and provide constructive feedback

In the next year: Trial a “lunch and learn” format where staff can share experiences and skills



“If it’s at a performance review, then it’s best to let the employee lead the chat.”

Natasha Bartlett-Twivey Ferris Heart Sloane

“We called it the ‘Martini Culture,’” explained chief executive and co-founder Ian Hughes. “It wasn’t about allowing staff to have a few quick drinks at lunchtime but was more a working culture based on the famous Joan Collins Martini advert of ‘Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere.’”

The business now uses OKRs, or “objective and key results”, to drive performance management. It links the work of each employee with a company’s overall strategic plan. The objectives outline what a company and employee wants to accomplish and the key results are how they get there.

Ian said, since implementation, employees and managers are working more clearly in the same direction and boosting profits. “We are looking at an uplift of eight per cent in gross margins since implementation,” he revealed. “We are seeing better customer service and improved efficiency and effectiveness. The fog within the business and between management and staff is being lifted.”

Another issue many businesses have comes in the form of shaping problems into constructive feedback, the kind of stimulus needed to get the most out of staff members.

Be personable

Giving bad news to someone isn’t easy. It’s important to be open, honest and encouraging, so you can get your message across without demotivating them and making matters worse.

Natasha Bartlett-Twivey is the owner of Buckinghamshire-based luxury artificial flowers company Ferris Heart Sloane. According to Natasha the best way to break bad news to struggling staff is to be direct but personable.

“If it’s at a performance review, then it’s best to let the employee lead the chat. You can prompt them with questions about how they’re feeling or how they’re finding work,” she said. “It helps to have a good relationship with your staff members because they’ll feel more comfortable talking about any issues. You really don’t want to be blunt about problems you’ve noticed.”

Suresite, a Preston-based retail services group, is another example of a business employing an alternative performance appraisal system for its staff. HR manager Janine Wilson believes the modern appraisal system needs to be focused on a continuous cycle.

“With our previous appraisals system, I felt that some of the set questions were too fluffy: ‘In this business, who do you aspire to be?’ and ‘Which areas do you want to work in?’” she explained.

“They didn’t add value for us or the employee. Our employees thought the questions were monotonous and a waste of time.”

Janine is now moving to more informal, quarterly appraisals with no set questions. “We’ll be asking staff if they have anything they want to raise or make a priority,” she added. “We want it to be a relaxed and informal conversation – something they don’t dread being asked to do. The chat needs to flow naturally and be open and honest, rather than a stilted box-checking exercise.”



“We want it to be a relaxed and informal conversation – something they don’t dread being asked to do”

Janine Wilson SeedLegals

SUMMARY

If you're fortunate enough to have a diverse workforce, one bringing together lots of different personality types, career backgrounds, ages and ethnicities then that's only going to be of benefit to your business. However, it does mean the way you approach motivating, training and managing your people will need particular care and attention.

If there is one thing that can be learnt from the SME insights shared in this guide it's that one size does not fit all. Getting the most out of your people and the teams they form requires a constantly evolving approach recognising the different drivers of motivation that exist in today's economy.

SMEs need to be able to develop career paths for employees, even if the structure of the company doesn't lend itself to this. Defining what good performance actually looks like provides the confidence for people to see a future in the company, an idea of what new challenges they might be able to take on in the future.

One business that blends a lot of this together very well is The Pig Hotel, where operations director Tom Ross has an interesting approach. "We take training really seriously and focus on what we call craft skills," he explained. "The business wants someone who isn't only a waiter, but wants to know about food, wine and the art of service – not just writing an order down and bringing out plates."

Training and engagement at all locations is driven by little and often communication and feedback. "We have coffee chats after week one and month one, after which appraisals happen throughout the year. This provides a way to give feedback, give action plans and create those pathways to improvement."

The company also has a budding entrepreneur scheme for people who want to commit to the business over a longer period of time. With The Pig Hotel group helping its staff to grow, staff are now starting to come through and fill bigger positions," he went on to say.

Get closer

Take some time to speak to your staff, even if it's only a quick coffee. Rather than making it a formalised meeting, grab five minutes with as many people as you can and find out what they're up to, whether anything is causing problems and what is going on outside the workplace. This will be a particularly powerful change if you don't normally have reason to interact with certain team members.

Next find other ways to properly gauge employee sentiment. Whether it is through an anonymous survey or suggestions box, any changes you make that impact staff need to be based on how they are really feeling.

Tailored personal development for each of your employees are not something that can be rolled out overnight, so take the time to work out what individual needs are and then budget accordingly. Some will favour the acquisition of new skills such as digital marketing and sales strategies, while others will want to be put on leadership courses. It's also important to make your employees feel as connected to this process as possible. That way they'll take ownership of its application back into their day-to-day jobs.

Companies with an engaged workforce perform 147 per cent better than their peers. Take the first steps towards making that happen today.



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