Want to Increase Productivity? Empower Employees, Embrace Technology — and Stay Positive

By EVAN WADE - Contributor

So, you want to build a company culture that will help increase productivity throughout the office. It's an admirable goal with the potential to transform your entire business. Whether you're a cutting-edge cloud business or a standard mom-and-pop grocery chain (or anything in between), a strong culture can have a big effect on productivity, engagement, and other biz-positive outcomes.

Empowering employees leads to increased productivity.

But first, you have to get there. And whether your plan is a reaction to a drop in productivity or comes as a more proactive move, there's work to be done. Here are a few things successful organizations do to boost productivity at the office:

They Empower Employees

At first, the word "empowerment" in a workplace setting sounds like more buzzword mumbo-jumbo. However, there's value in the idea that empowerment increases productivity. It lets employees do more on the power of their own decisions, makes them feel their employers trust them enough to give them that authority, and lets them get to work — which is a huge factor behind, you know, staying...
productive. Can your sales reps cut deals without frantically flagging down their managers through a conference room window? Can your service reps calm down an angry patron without the added pressure of their supervisor's watchful eyes? Employees work through small things like this every day, and they'll greatly appreciate it if they don't have to needlessly jump through hoops anymore.

They Make Criticism a Good Thing

To some degree, this falls under the general banner of positivity, but it's big enough to mention on its own. While you won't convince every employee that "You aren't doing _____ right" is an opportunity to improve and is not a punishment or personal judgment, your rules and standard operating procedures should reflect the thought all the same. The goal here is to help employees do better without making them feel like they're being excessively monitored or that their jobs are at stake. Instead, try the popular "compliment sandwich" strategy, where the manager puts every criticism between two compliments — it'll taste better this way. If you frame criticism as less of a job review and more of a chance to help the business improve, most people will come around over time.

They Stay Positive

Make a note here, because positivity has an unquestionably beneficial effect on productivity. Like the example above, this one's more about taking standard facts of workplace life and tweaking perceptions. Ask yourself the following questions to gauge your workplace's positivity:

- Do your managers get angry about mistakes, or do they make a serious attempt to listen and uncover the problems that might be causing them?
- Is your office a dour place, or do the rules — and perks — encourage fun?
- Do you actively discourage drama, behind-the-back talking, and other positivity-killing shenanigans from the top?

A positive workplace is one that values its employees — and valued employees work harder.

They Embrace Technology

Besides enabling employees to be more efficient, technology is also a boon when it comes to measuring key performance metrics. For example, a restaurant could increase productivity with something as simple as a wireless thermometer in the refrigerator. Suddenly, instead of a beleaguered employee having to record temperatures every hour, the computer does it for them. Additionally, giving employees the right technology to let them work from home when life happens — or even on the regular — is a great way to keep them productive, but on their terms. However, whatever your people do, look for ways to implement cloud technology into your plans.

The cloud can boost employee potential through its mobility-enhancing, collaboration-friendly capabilities. Employees value tools that let them approach work on their terms, making tools that offer consistent digital workspaces across a variety of platforms perfect for productivity-boosting initiatives. Something as simple as being able to edit a document on the train home or using email to respond to an inline product note on-the-go can make a big difference, and that's before considering the larger capabilities consistent accessibility can bring.
They Don't Mistake Efficiency for Productivity

We saved the biggest one for last: While productivity does mean how well an office gets things done, it's often confused with efficiency. And while efficiency is important, it doesn't sum up the broader scope of productivity. Instead, successful businesses look at how well a job gets done and which tools they can provide to enable it. For instance, it's good when sales reps efficiently move customers through the purchase process, but it's better when they provide an excellent experience to customers and keep them coming back. That's true even if they take a little more time getting the job done.

The same goes for that manager who is a bit too soft on the rules when it comes to managing people but gets great results in every department she is assigned to. While you may not be able to turn a blind eye to every rule she lets her people bend (attendance is one common source of conflict here), attempting to understand what drives her decisions can lead to insights that transform your idea of management.

Cloud technology can be a major benefit on this front, too. Give that slow sales rep access to a full-bore cloud customer relationship management solution, and he could provide a better experience than ever without adding time per interaction. Your problem manager's lax attendance enforcement, on the other hand, could be resolved (and indeed, turned into an asset) with tools that allow her to connect and communicate with staff anywhere they happen to be working.

As good as technology is at bolstering specific processes and enforcing established rules, it really shines when it's helping you identify, promote, and encourage examples of good work that can't easily be summed up in a spreadsheet. Once you understand that, you've captured the zeitgeist of productivity.

*For more tips on increasing productivity, contact a Vonage Business consultant.*