

Mission Ready

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Motivating Without Money

Many of today's business consultants would have us believe that the only way to motivate our employees is with money - in the form of bonuses, salary hikes, overtime, or increased benefits and perks. And, of course, as good managers, we want our people to have the best the company can offer. But sometimes we just don't have the money; it simply hasn't been allocated. What do we do then?

There is an organization we can look to for creative ways to inspire our "rank and file" - an organization made up almost entirely of highly motivated near-minimum wage employees - the United States Marine Corps. Morale in the Corps is legendary; yet, if the truth were to be known, most Marines earn about a thousand dollars a month. Nevertheless, these young men and women - demographically much like your employees - walk down the street in their Dress Blues, feeling like a million bucks. Clearly, these proud and energetic individuals are motivated by factors other than the money.

Frankly, it all begins before they even join; the prospect of belonging to "the Few, the Proud" holds out the hope of transformation into a more capable person. Those of us in Human Resources should never underestimate a young person's desire to change for the better - no matter how confident, or even cocky, they may appear during the hiring interview.

Then, during Boot Camp, the new recruits

are constantly reminded that one day they will become members of "America's Finest." Please note that the transformation is not overnight. Recruits are not addressed as "Marines" for nearly three months; they must first pass through the crucible of training. Why is it we, in private enterprise, greet our new employees with "Welcome to the team," without creating the conditions that make for a meaningful graduation from our own training? We should be saying, instead, "Welcome to the best training program in the industry. In a short but intense time, you'll be the envy of your profession."

Then, after Boot Camp, a Marine continues to hear almost daily of the honor - and of the obligation - of belonging to such an elite organization. Throughout his/her tour of duty, a Marine feels special, because he/she belongs to something special. As managers, we have to ask ourselves if our minimum wage employees feel special. That kind of self-esteem can be cultivated if our people feel as if they belong to the best organization in the entire industry. Public relations spinning alone won't accomplish this. Remember, the Marines can back up their sense of elitism with a record of performance. Once we managers truly believe we have the good fortune to be with the best company in the business, that passion becomes contagious. When we walk the walk, and talk the talk, our people will follow.