

# Executive **EDGE**

## MARINE-STYLE MOTIVATION

You may not think your organization has much in common with Marine boot camp, but the results of a three-year study of organizations that excel at motivating their frontline employees suggest that the motivational techniques of the U.S. Marine Corps outflank others by an impressive margin, and can be successfully applied in the business world.

Frontline workers—whether answering phones, cleaning rooms and bathrooms, or serving meals—are the face and voice of an organization. Yet because frontline jobs tend to be low-paying and monotonous, offering little chance for advancement, it is often difficult to emotionally engage frontline workers in an organization's mission.

The Marines follow the "mission, values, and pride" (MVP) path to a high-performing workforce. Underpinning this overarching culture, which builds collective pride and mutual trust, are five managerial practices:

- Overinvest at the beginning in inculcating core values. Most companies teach new hires the organization's values, but this may be little more than an add-on topic at orientation. Bring values to center stage early on,

possibly extending training programs from mere hours to days or even weeks.

- Prepare every person to lead. Every frontline worker should be considered a potential leader and given leadership training that takes into account his or her style of leadership. This adds to the leadership capacity and performance capabilities of the entire organization.

- Distinguish between teams and single-leader work groups. Too often work groups are characterized as teams when they are really led by one person who directs the work. Clarity on this

point builds trust and lets people know what is expected of them.

- Attend to the bottom half. In today's economy, it is no longer cheaper to replace frontline workers than to try to keep them. Investing in workers to prevent failure engenders personal and collective pride and loyalty.

- Use positive discipline to build pride. Avoid top-down discipline and encourage self-discipline and group discipline.



From Jon R. Katzenbach and Jason A. Santamaria, "Firing Up the Front Line," Harvard Business Review, May-June 1999, pp. 107-117.

## KEEPING EMPLOYEES IN THE FOLD

It may be hard to find good help these days, but keeping it has become even more challenging.

While some up-and-coming execs jump ship because they receive offers they couldn't refuse, many others who excel decide to move on because they aren't happy in their work. Savvy managers can often convince them to stay through "job-sculpting"—tailoring their work to align with their life interests. More than hobbies or personal endeavors, life interests are long-held, emotionally driven passions for certain activities. For example, application of technology, counseling and mentoring, and creative production are three categories of life interests for people drawn to business careers.

Job sculpting isn't an easy task. For starters, most employees haven't even identified their life interests. A boss needs to have an ongoing dialogue with employees and be intensely curious about what motivates them. The manager needs to listen carefully to workers' likes and dislikes and ask probing questions during performance reviews. Better still, before reviews, the manager should challenge employees to write their personal views of a satisfying career.

As managers help their rising stars shape their job responsibilities, they are using the same flexible management style to keep their senior executives in place. With the first wave of the baby-boom generation creeping toward retirement, many are ready to leave the

day-to-day office stress behind them. Since birth rates have declined while the need for white-collar workers has risen, replacements are hard to find.

To avoid this talent shortage, companies have developed flexible arrangements to entice their seniors to stick around. Some let them shift to part-time schedules, allow them to mentor younger colleagues, or customize consulting contracts to their needs. Several youth-oriented technology firms have tapped retired execs to serve on their boards, drawing on their business acumen.

From Jennifer Reingold and Diane Brady, "Brain Drain," Business Week, Sept. 20, 1999, pp. 112-126; and Timothy Butler and James Waldroop, "Job Sculpting: The Art of Retaining Your Best People," Harvard Business Review, September-October 1999, pp. 144-152, 174.