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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

motivating staff members

Tips for helping employees to work more efficiently, increasing their productivity and your bottom line.

If I see a dime on the street, I stop and pick it up—and you probably do too. Why? Because money motivates! This month, I want to talk about motivating your staff with money.

I think incentive plans are great. I always run the idea by shop owners when I am in shops to train staff members. The two most common responses I hear are: "I already pay them enough. Why should I pay them extra just to do their jobs?" and "Sure, I'd love to give them some kind of bonus plan, but I don't know where to start."

At the flower shop where I worked in New York City, we did not have an incentive plan. We took our jobs very seriously and really went above and beyond the call of duty. I think it was a combination of the pace of the city and the professional, corporate culture that the owner cultivated; however, a bonus plan probably would have made me hustle even more!

It's wonderful to visit a flower shop that offers insurance and sometimes even profit sharing or a 401(k) plan. Kudos to those owners capable of giving those types of plans to their staffs. But there are owners who complain—justifiably—that they are giving their staffs good benefits, and they still hear gripes about money. That's because the employees can't use their no-deductible dental insurance plan to pay their rent or make their car payments. Staff members often view these valuable extras as intangibles and not a true part of their earnings package.

I understand the hesitation to offer more money for doing the same job; however, here are three points for you to consider. First, the floral industry is not known for paying well, and that may prevent some strong candidates from applying to your business. That said, if you offered a bonus plan, you could state, "Competitive hourly rate to

The idea behind offering an incentive plan ... is to get more performance from your staff. ... You will be sharing increased profits with them because their more efficient work will improve your bottom line.

employee benefits plans

Let's face it, you can pay only so much. Sometimes I get the feeling that some of the people I train are there just for a paycheck and, given the chance, would bolt out the door to work at Mega Discount for 50 cents an hour more!

\$XX, including incentives." Second, offering a bonus plan may help you to keep some staff who might be looking elsewhere for a better hourly wage. And you know how much time and money you need to invest in training a new hire. Third, you can boost morale by

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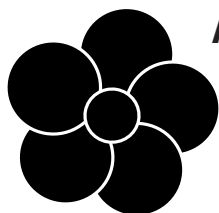
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success strategies

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giving your staff members a chance to start earning more now rather than waiting for their annual reviews.

The idea behind offering an incentive plan—from your perspective—is to get more performance from your staff. On the most basic level, you will be sharing increased profits with them because their more efficient work will improve your bottom line. In other words, don't bemoan handing out bonuses; they will be funded by the staff.

making it worth the cost

A critical first step is to determine what more you need from your staff. Here are some common goals, broken down by department.

Sales. Increase the average value of transactions, and take orders with fewer mistakes.

Design. Keep waste and cost-of-goods down, pay more attention to details and so on.

Delivery. Deliver orders by the times promised, and deliver all items to the recipients looking like they did when they left the store.

Obviously, you can create your own set of criteria. In addition, here are a few ideas for tracking the results.

Tracking sales. Use your point-of-sale (POS) system to check average increases by staff members against last month's figures. Alternately, using a group number, offer an incentive to the staff for a boost in the store's overall figures.

Tracking design. Spot-check each design for being on budget and accurate to the order. You can pay incentives per designer or, again, a group incentive.

Tracking delivery. Track customer/recipient complaints regarding delivery issues, and pay more for fewer complaints. Additionally, consider an incentive for fewer redeliveries (forcing drivers to take the initiative to leave flowers on a protected porch or with a neighbor, for example).

These suggestions may sound vague, but they're meant to get you thinking about how you can run your shop better and reward your staff for working smarter. I have developed detailed plans, down to the paperwork and computer reports to run. Contact me for further information.

Other questions that come up are when and how to pay the incentives.

Both questions should be directed to your accountant because the extra money may affect employees' tax status.

other types of motivators

Though I have talked money throughout this column, there are other smart ways to motivate your staff. To create some team spirit, you could provide a pizza lunch once a week or

month, giving the entire company a chance to congregate informally. When a customer or recipient sends a message of gratitude, give a gift certificate to the salesperson, designer and driver involved with the order. Finally, if a staff member goes above and beyond the call of duty, write a thank-you card, and include a note offering a half (or full) day off. People love time off. You can put parameters on it, such as "To be used during the summer months" or "Upon approval of your manager" because you want to make sure you are covered in each department.

The bottom line is that you can get a lot more from your staff by giving a little back! ■

Tim Huckabee, AIFSE, is president of Floral Strategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For help with improving your customer service, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at contact@floralstrategies.com, or visit www.floralstrategies.com.

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