

Beating the blues: Training the de-motivated

Issue 23-07-08

Getting through to de-motivated staff can be a challenge for the most ardent trainer but not if you focus on those three little words: diversity, empathy and relevance, says Verity Gough.



Most trainers are likely to come across a roomful of people who really don't want to be there. So when faced with the task of boosting delegates' flagging morales, how and where do you focus your training?

It's a more common dilemma than you may think. According to the latest figures from Investors in People, two thirds of the UK workforce is de-motivated. But while it may just sound like a matter of semantics to some, Jim Lawless, founder of newly launched soft skills training and personal development company Zoobites, believes that the word 'motivation' can be a problem in itself.

"I don't know what motivates delegates," he admits. "One person might be motivated by cash, another by pleasing their boss and the person next to them by self-fulfilment. I can't motivate any of those people because I don't know what buttons to press. However, what I can do is inspire them."

To this end, his methods concentrate on putting the emphasis on the desire to learn, rather than the acquisition of new skills. He refers to this as the 'skill' and the 'will'. "We assist an individual in finding their own desire to do something and build the self confidence to take that brave leap, even if it is as simple as switching off the PowerPoint slides and facing the audience," he explains. "Once we have tackled that, we can teach them the skills."

Making it relevant

According to Matthew Jennings, training director at management training providers Spark Training, it's all about finding common ground. "We always work with things that are relevant to delegates' day-to-day jobs, rather than using something that is generic," he says. "This way they will be more interested because they recognise it or see that it could be applicable in the future."



"What you don't want to give is a bland experience; a five out of 10, mediocre way of working."

Peter Cook, motivational speaker

He believes that the worrying increase in de-motivated employees can be attributed to organisations' lack of awareness of their staff training needs. To make sure delegates get the most out of the training, Jennings talks to each individual beforehand to ascertain their specific needs. "This means they already start to feel individually recognised; that their opinion matters and they are worth listening to," he explains.

Doing this ticks several boxes, such as making them accountable for their training and ensuring they buy into it. If you then tie the training in with their actual role, it becomes industry-specific, rather than just a management training day. People start to see its usefulness.

Another essential element Jennings employs to keep eyes from glazing over is to offer multi-sensory training, which could involve group discussion, lecturing or active participation. "I'd advise trainers to change the training methods constantly," he says. "It helps keep up the pace so people remain involved and their minds are kept active."

He also recommends implementing an action learning plan which can be introduced over a period of time. This allows the delegates to go off and use the skills in their day-to-day roles before returning to the training room for evaluation.

His company's post-training 'surgery' addresses any problems participants may have had and allows them to share their experiences and evaluate their own training, spotting their successes and identifying areas of weakness.

Life laundry

Peter Cook, business speaker and author of 'Sex, Leadership and Rock 'n' Roll', has yet another approach to motivational training. He implements a cathartic process which he refers to as 'bitching with attitude.' "Everyone likes to moan about work and it can be therapeutic," he says. "I run a two-stage process: letting people unleash their inner demons and then getting them to act on it and make positive changes."



"It's no use having an Olympic gold medal winner standing in front of a group of factory workers telling them to live the dream and go for it, when the reality is they can't. It's a desperate carrot to dangle in front of them." *Jim Lawless, Zoobites*

Delegates are encouraged to offload the issues affecting their work, citing the reasons for their lack of motivation before deciding on a plan of action to improve the situation. Another simple remedy he offers is the 'life laundry' strategy, which enables individuals to de-clutter their jobs and rid themselves of the unnecessary tasks which bog them down.

However, the main core of his motivational training focuses on unifying delegates by having them sharing a motivational experience. Cook does this through the use of rock music. One of his recent clients, blue-chip manufacturer Unilever, even ended up using one of the songs its delegates wrote and performed during training for a promotional video.

He suggests trainers make their sessions as memorable as possible so people can bond over the experience and create positive memories of the day. "What you don't want to give is a bland experience; a five out of 10, mediocre way of working," Cook adds. "You have to have a burning platform where people feel they are struggling and have overcome something."

The motivation diet

It's all very well engaging delegates in the training room, evaluating their skills in relation to their everyday roles and keeping the mood buoyant with role-play, but if the problem lies with the individual's own health issues, motivation isn't going to make a blind bit of difference.

The latest medical research now backs up the theory that eating the right breakfast and boosting your positive pheromones with exercise is among other measures that can reap dividends for desk-bound employees. And while enrolling staff on a boot camp is unlikely to be practical for all companies, there are a number of new courses appearing on the market which aim to help get people moving and, hopefully, motivated.

One example is Zoobites' new workshop: 'The Elite Athlete at Work', which concentrates on helping stressed-out, high-level executives understand how to keep themselves fit and motivated. They have even drafted in top Olympic sportsman Jon Pitts to help write the programme.

However, Lawless agrees that any trainers tackling the de-motivated should be able to both empathise with the individual and be able to make the training relevant to their specific role. "It's no use having an Olympic gold medal winner standing in front of a group of factory workers telling them to live the dream and go for it, when the reality is they can't," he says. "They may be on the breadline or have kids to feed and bills to pay – it's a desperate carrot to dangle in front of them.

"Empathy is something you can work at and understand, and is an essential attribute for a trainer to have, whether they are dealing with de-motivated people or not."



Steve Martin of 'Influence at Work and co-author of Yes! 50 Secrets from the Science of Persuasion' gives us his top tips on engaging less motivated learners

Find out the individual's personal values and goals and show how the proposed training and development aligns to them.

Start small and build – look for small actions to help build their commitment to training such as offering taster workshops or talking to previous attendees.

Point out the uniqueness of your training and what an individual stands to gain if they get involved, as well as what they will lose if they choose not to.

Seek endorsements from recognised bodies so that your training and development programmes are seen as credible.

Don't just rely on your own persuasiveness – show examples of how others have benefited from your training.