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opinion



Jim Lawless is a motivational speaker and runs Zoobites, a soft skills training company.

Motivational speakers – great idea or waste of money?

How often have you sat through a 'motivational' speaker's address that has left you feeling anything but? The trick, says Jim Lawless, is to ensure the speaker is properly briefed.

Companies spend a lot of money on motivational speakers to inspire their people and make them feel passionate about their work. But is it a worthwhile investment? If the speaker fails to effect a change in your staff and hence in your business, you may feel you have wasted your money. It has been argued that they often act as no more than a short-term booster with few long-term benefits. So how can you ensure that your experience with a speaker is worthwhile?

If you go for a speaker who is professional and understands business it can be a valuable investment – but you must be clear on what part a motivational speaker should fulfil and what part the business has to play. A motivational speaker cannot and should not talk about the market conditions, make projections or look at targets.

Destroying credibility

Equally, an outside speaker cannot reinforce your company's vision or strategy or give the impression of reading from the managing director's script, as that will destroy their credibility. What a speaker can do is to inspire an audience to believe that they can achieve things they never thought possible – and embolden them to give it a shot.

But if the organisation has given them nothing to believe in, the benefit is lost, or used elsewhere, and staff can become disappointed and demotivated following the presentation.

Always brief the speaker thoroughly so that they understand the company and what they need to

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achieve – feel free to ask for the speaker's ideas on what you should do to capitalise on their visit.

I gave more than 100 conference addresses last year alone. I have never been asked on the pre-event briefing call what the client needs to do to ensure that they are ready to capitalise on the motivation they are asking me to generate. In a few cases this is because the company already understands what the impact will be and is prepared for it. But more often than not they just have not thought about it.

Investment rewarded

If your investment is rewarded and your people emerge fired up and full of ideas, will you be ready for the impact on the day job? Are there processes in place to harness all the new ideas and show that they are being listened to?

If your line managers aren't prepared and meet new ideas with indifference, the inspiration will be lost. Reward and celebrate people's new-found enthusiasm and make sure they know it has not gone unnoticed. Say what your senior team will do to contribute to the new order and perhaps have them make a presentation to staff at the event, outlining their commitment.

If all you want to achieve with a speaker is to make your people laugh in the graveyard slot, book a comedian. If you want to achieve genuine change for and through your people, make sure you have done the preparation to achieve that result, or you will be wasting your money.

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