

# MOTIVATIONAL MANAGER

Strategies to  
increase morale  
and productivity  
in the workplace

## Need to lower stress? Consider getting rid of the stress-makers

The Internet is brimming with Web sites for employees toiling under toxic bosses. But what about the managers who have to spend their days trying to manage and motivate toxic employees? Let's face it: No matter how skilled you are at bringing out the best in people, some employees can't be rehabilitated. If a bad apple is spoiling your bunch, take this approach:

- **Weigh the pros and cons.** Unfortunately, not all problem employees are poor performers. In fact, some of them may be stars with swelled heads. In any case, you need to calculate whether bad employees' talents outweigh the trouble they cause. Think of it this way: Is it worth losing two good employees to keep one star? Given the cost of replacing workers,

the answer is "probably not." If stars refuse to play nice, be willing to send them off to twinkle elsewhere.

- **Consider the consequences.** These days, it would be foolish to think of firing an employee without first considering the legal ramifications. Yes, problem workers may well continue to cause problems if you force them to leave. But you can't let fear of a lawsuit blackmail you into keeping a disruptive or unproductive worker on staff. As long as you follow standard procedures, can demonstrate fair treatment, and can document the employee's misdeeds and your efforts to correct them, you should have little cause for concern.

—Adapted from "Discarding your bad apples," in *Principal's Report*

## Take this advice to ease the pain of negotiating

Mention negotiating and most people envision a verbal tug-of-war that only one side can win. But negotiating doesn't have to be so painful. Here's how to make it easier:

- **Keep a positive attitude.** If you march into negotiations as though you're marching to war, they'll be hostile. Assume you'll find a way to see that your needs are met.
- **Take a deep breath.** Lighten up before launching into your pitch.

Don't invite the other side to feed off your tension.

- **Consider another view.** Imagine what's going through the mind of your negotiating counterpart. What does this person need in order to feel satisfied and create a win-win outcome?

—Adapted from "Negotiating skill is key to success," by Fay Fleming, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

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## Web Access

To access the subscribers-only sections of the *Motivational Manager* Web site, go to [www.managementresources.com/mm](http://www.managementresources.com/mm)

### Here's an unusual idea for improving retention

For most managers, discovering that employees are polishing their résumés brings panic. But some managers have learned that pushing workers to update their résumés is a good way to improve retention. Each year, as part of their performance appraisal, ask workers in your department to update their résumés to reflect new training or skills. Use the exercise to open a dialogue about your staff's progress and what areas need to be addressed in order for them to reach their full potential.

—Adapted from “Three experts’ tips for hiring, retaining IT staffs,” by John McCormick, on the CIO Insight Web site

### Ask this question to see if candidates can get off to a fast start

Want to know if prospective job candidates are prepared to hit the ground running? Try asking this question during the job interview: *If you get this job, what tasks would you want to tackle first?* Their answers will tell you how much they know about your organization and their pending role in the company—and how quickly they'll be able to start making a contribution.

—Adapted from “Tips for interviewing prospective employees,” on the BuyerZone Web site

### Find out if sticky notes are jeopardizing sensitive information

How we love our sticky notes! But have you ever considered that those little yellow sheets might become a big security problem? According to a recent survey by DigitalPersona and the Business Performance Management Forum, IT data breaches are becoming far too common as people at all levels of the organization exchange passwords or jot them on sticky notes then stick them onto computers, desks, and walls where anyone can see them. To be on the safe side, check to make sure you and your employees are keeping your passwords in safe locations away from prying eyes.

## Step up and take charge of poor performers

Do you do a good job of dealing with poor performers? If your answer is yes, you're in the minority. According to a survey by the KEYGroup consulting firm, only 31 percent of employees feel their managers respond appropriately to poor performers.

The fact is, most people avoid confrontation. As a result, poor performers never clean up their act and good performers become frustrated by the double standard. How can you make poor performers accountable? KEYGroup president Joanne Sujansky offers these suggestions:

- **Be timely.** Confronting poor performers becomes more daunting the longer you put it off. Commit to immediately addressing the situation so troublesome workers will know exactly what they've done wrong. If they seem emotionally overwhelmed, it's okay to allow them time to calm down or complete the task at hand—but don't allow so much time that the incident seems distant and irrelevant.
- **Be individualized.** Some people respond better when you tell it like it is without sugarcoating, while others prefer criticism to be handled more delicately. Get to know your staff so you can respond in the way that's most useful to each individual.
- **Be specific.** Don't let a poor performer's bad attitude goad you into making exaggerated statements such as “You never do that right!” or “You're

always late.” Instead, be specific: “You were 15 minutes late this morning and 20 minutes late yesterday.”

- **Be relevant.** When confronting problem workers, it's important to focus solely on performance and avoid straying into personal opinion. You may, for instance, feel a poor performer is selling herself short or failing to live up to her talent—and that's something you might address during a lengthy annual review. But your immediate concern is correcting ineffective performance.
- **Be realistic.** Make sure you're not labeling people as poor performers because of issues outside their control. If, say, an employee consistently misses delivery goals, perhaps the process is more at fault than the person. Investigate to ensure you lay blame where it belongs.
- **Be thorough.** See that the problem employee takes your concerns seriously by creating a series of action steps and scheduling times for follow-up. Be clear about the consequences if the employee fails to meet your expectations.
- **Be cautious.** Always carefully document discussions with poor performers and note the outcomes. But, Sujansky warns, don't simply create a dossier of mistakes. Your documentation should also reflect the efforts employees make to improve.

## Use exit interviews to get a handle on problems

When conducting exit interviews, remember that departing employees can help you learn about problems before they become all-consuming. Pay special attention to suggestions of:

- **Harassment.** Prompt the employee to provide details, then follow up with an investigation. You may be able to correct inappropriate behavior before a suit is filed.
- **Overwork.** Ask about scheduling, workload, and staff productivity. You

may be able to make changes before more employees become disgruntled.

- **Underpayment.** Compare your salaries to those of other area employees. You may find you need to make adjustments.

—Adapted from “Covering all the bases: Conducting exit interviews when employees quit,” by Susan L. Maupin, in the *South Carolina Employment Law Letter*

## Motivate small-business employees in four simple steps

It's tough enough to motivate workers when you work for a large company that can afford extravagant rewards and incentives. So what do you do when you're a small-business owner with a tight budget? Follow these steps:

- 1. Share your vision.** One benefit of small organizations is that they can become like families with everyone working toward a common goal. Try to generate enthusiasm by talking about your company mission and the pride you'll feel in achieving your goals together.
- 2. Admit your limitations.** No, you can't afford to send your team on a cruise or to provide an in-house masseuse. But there may be other things that mean more to workers—such as creating a meal list to help out someone who's caring for a sick relative, or giving employees an afternoon off to attend their child's baseball game. Ask everyone to offer

suggestions on how to create mutual benefit without spending a fortune.

- 3. Offer interesting opportunities.** Cross-training can be especially important in small businesses where losing a single worker to the flu can leave you desperately short-staffed. Use the opportunity to develop talent and give workers a chance to shake up their routine by learning new functions.
- 4. Use your imagination.** Have fun coming up with incentives and rewards that don't cost a fortune but provide a lot of enjoyment. For instance, offer to come over and cook dinner or clean the garage for the worker who sells the highest number of widgets. Or give the whole staff an afternoon off to attend a movie matinee.

—Adapted from “How to motivate small-business employees,” on the AccountingWEB Web site

## Try these strategies to motivate call-center workers

For many call-center managers, motivating workers to do a good job is secondary to getting them to show up. MarySue Lucci understands. The president and cofounder of MaraStar Communications, a Pennsylvania-based company that provides training to the customer-service industry, Lucci has spent more than two decades working to motivate call-center employees. She offers this advice:

- **Greet them warmly.** Welcome employees as they come in for their shift. Say hello, praise them for coming in on time, exchange pleasantries, ask about their families, pets, hobbies. Let them know you value them as individuals and not just warm bodies filling a station.
- **Coach them routinely.** Take an interest in their tasks. Ask how you can help them do their jobs better or cope with difficult callers. Provide a willing ear when they need to vent about their frustrations. Let them see they have your support.

- **Train them effectively.** Spending every day attached to a headset can quickly grow tiresome. Training programs can be an ideal way to give call-center workers a much needed break. Schedule regular training sessions that provide a dramatic and entertaining contrast to the usual dull routine. And since call-center workers are often isolated from their peers, strive to create sessions that provide a lot of opportunity for interaction and team-building.
- **Involve them consistently.** Struggling with poor attendance and low morale among your call-center staff? Ask them how to fix the problem. Show them you value their insights and engage them in creating workable solutions.

—Adapted from “Pay attention to your call center and customer service staff and they'll reward you with better attendance,” on the Technology Marketing Corporation (TMC) Web site

### Make sure e-mail attachments benefit your recipients

One sure way to annoy customers or colleagues is by e-mailing large—and largely unnecessary—attachments. Remember, the larger the attachment, the longer it takes to download. And those extra seconds can be precious to people who are pressed for time. Solve the problem by compressing attachments when possible, sending only attachments that are really needed, and asking permission if you're not sure what the recipient wants.

—Adapted from “Email etiquette rules for effective email replies,” on [emailreplies.com](http://emailreplies.com)

### Beware of these excuses for not protecting your core assets

Crisis management jumped to the forefront following 9/11. But now many companies have become complacent about protecting core assets. Consider these excuses: *It can't happen here.* Disasters can strike anywhere. *Ours is a low-risk environment.* Conduct a thorough risk assessment. *We have more important priorities.* Calculate the cost should a disaster occur. *We operate in a safe community.*

Analyze the disaster experiences of others in your location or industry. *We have a plan.* Make sure your plan has been adequately updated and tested.

—Adapted from “The human side of crisis management,” by Bruce T. Blythe, on the Crisis Management International Web site

### Follow this employer's example to cut unscheduled absences

Want to make sure your employees show up when they're scheduled? You could try the strategy used by Design Mobil, a bedroom furniture manufacturer based in Tauranga, New Zealand. In an effort to curb a high rate of absenteeism among the company's 69 employees, managers began paying workers for their unused sick leave at the end of each year. The decision resulted in a significant decline in the number of unscheduled absences.

—Adapted from “Wow your workers,” by Nikki Mandow, on the Unlimited Magazine Web site

### Don't distract meeting attendees with unnecessary reading materials

Do you want attendees to be fully engaged in meeting discussions? Then don't ask them to read thick handouts and other written materials while the meeting is underway. If you need to provide background information, distribute it in advance with the instruction that invitees come prepared to discuss the material. Once the meeting begins, participants should be focused on the discussion, not trying to read your supporting materials.  
—Adapted from the Chaco Canyon Consulting Web site

### Give employees time to become proficient at new skills

You can't expect workers to master new skills after only a few hours of training. What they need is for you to give them time—and patience—while they put their new skills into practice. Recognize that quality and efficiency may temporarily decline as workers struggle to adapt to newly learned methods. By providing ongoing coaching—and giving employees leeway to stumble as they test the waters—you can ensure training pays off in the long run.  
—Adapted from "Employee training: Ten tips for making it really effective," by Vicki Heath, on the ESL Teachers Board Web site

### Avoid surprising workers with unexpected negativity

If you want to surprise workers, throw them a party. But don't make the mistake of surprising them with negative feedback during an annual performance review. Since it's impossible to create meaningful behavior modification during a once-yearly conversation, you should be discussing performance issues as they occur. The annual evaluation is a time to revisit these prior discussions and discuss how employees have followed up—not an opportunity to spring criticism out of the blue.  
—Adapted from "Simple strategies to improve your midyear performance appraisals," by Lauren Stiller Rikleen, in *Law Office Management & Administration Report*

## Master the art of giving productive feedback

Perhaps the most significant—and most difficult—aspect of coaching is learning to give instructive feedback that will be well-received. Hone your skills by remembering this advice from Clear-Rock, a Massachusetts-based executive coaching and outplacement firm:

- **Good news first.** Most of us are quick to let people know when they're doing something wrong. But workers will be more receptive to—and less demoralized by—criticism if you begin by focusing on the things they're doing right.
- **The "I's" have it.** Don't shy away from the fact that you—and you alone—are making an observation or offering criticism. When you say, "*We* feel" this or "*We* think" that, you give the impression that the entire management team is ganging up on the employee. Instead, say, "*I* think" this or that.
- **Stick to business.** It's not your place to offer feedback about how employees wear their hair (unless it specifically relates to job function) or what political party they support. Your criticism—or praise—should be limited to job-related behaviors.
- **No dumping.** You may have 10 examples of an employee's missteps—but it's not necessary to share all of them. When offering criticism, you should give one or two examples to graphically illustrate your point, but going beyond that can overwhelm employees and leave them feeling dumped on.
- **Right back at ya.** Once you've offered your feedback, give employees the opportunity to respond. Even if they simply try to rationalize the behavior, it's important that you allow them the opportunity to speak their minds.

You can find additional tips on giving feedback by visiting the *Motivational Manager* Web site at [www.managementresources.com/mm](http://www.managementresources.com/mm) and selecting the Web Extras section.

## Stuck in a career rut? Take these steps to spice things up

Worried that your career is stuck in neutral? Rev things up with these strategies:

- **Look into the future.** Think about where you want to be 10 years from now. Now work backward. In order to be in the desired spot 10 years from now, where will you need to be in eight years? And to get there, where will you need to be in six years? Use this process to set incremental goals that will help you start moving forward.
- **Hire a coach.** If you have trouble figuring out how to get from where you are to where you want to be, maybe you should seek professional help in the form of a career coach. A coach can provide an objective assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and can help you map out a strategy for achieving your goals.
- **Develop new interests.** So you're not ready—or not in a position—to make career changes. Does that mean you have to keep spinning your wheels in frustration? Not necessarily. You may be able to get out of your rut by expanding your interests. Try becoming engaged in volunteer work, joining a club, getting involved in a sport, or taking a class. Becoming a more rounded person can help resolve your frustration and add to your skills set.  
—Adapted from "Reinvigorate your career," by Scott Beagrie, in *Personnel Today* magazine

THE MANAGER'S

# iDeA File

## Warning: Don't eat the iPod

Does it sometimes seem that you spend an excessive amount of time telling people what *not* to do? Things could be worse. Imagine being charged with writing product warning labels that will spare your company every conceivable type of litigation. Here are a few of the wackiest real-life examples:

- **Warning: This costume does not enable flight or super strength.** You guessed it. This is the warning for the Superman costumes sold by Houston-based Frankel's Costume.
- **Warning: Do not use for personal hygiene.** The product: Scrubbing Bubbles Fresh Brush—a toilet brush. This label was recognized with an award at the annual Wacky Warning Label Contest hosted by the advocacy group Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch.
- **Warning: This product moves when used.** This is the label issued with the Razor scooter. Apparently it was feared that some consumers might buy the scooter with the goal of not moving?
- **Warning: Do not iron clothes on body.** The folks marketing Rowenta's irons defend this label by noting that people do occasionally stop to iron a couple of wrinkles as they're rushing out the door.
- **Warning: Keep pet birds out of the kitchen when using this product.** This warning for Bialetti Casa Italiana's nonstick pans isn't as crazy as it seems. A spokesperson explains that hot Teflon can give off fumes that may irritate pets.
- **Warning: Ask a doctor before use if you have difficulty urinating due to enlarged prostate.** This medical warning doesn't seem too off-the-wall until you realize that it's for Midol Menstrual Complete.
- **Warning: Do not eat.** Yes, this warning has appeared on the Web site for Apple's iPod shuffle. Maybe execs are concerned that the Apple logo will confuse people.

—Adapted from Forbes.com

## Manager no-nos

What frustrates employees most? Researchers at Florida State University polled 700 workers in a variety of jobs and found employees complaining of bosses who:

- Fail to give credit when due (experienced by 37 percent of respondents)
- Give them the "silent treatment" (31 percent)

- Make negative comments about them to other employees or managers (27 percent)
- Invade their privacy (24 percent)
- Blame others in order to cover up their own mistakes (23 percent)

—Adapted from "Battling with bosses," by Josh Newton, in the *Daily Press* (Tahlequah, Okla.)

## Quiz: Taking the high road

When conflicts arise, do you respectfully speak your truth—or do you quickly unsheathe your sword? Test your style by taking this quick quiz:

- 1. You're competing with a colleague for a high-profile project and accidentally stumble across evidence that your nemesis is thinking of leaving the company. You:**
  - a. Rush to share the news with your bosses.
  - b. Forget about it. You don't need to rely on covert info to outshine your competitors.
  - c. Tell your competitor what you've learned and demand that he or she walk away from the project—or else.
- 2. An employee infuriates you by showing up late to an important meeting. You:**
  - a. Immediately rip into the employee, noting that this is the third time the person has been late to a meeting.
  - b. Make a mental note to discuss the problem with the employee at a more appropriate time.
  - c. Sarcastically say, "I'm glad you could finally join us," then move on with the meeting.
- 3. A colleague well-known for being negative makes a nasty remark about your presentation. You:**
  - a. Fire back with an equally nasty critique of his or her last speech.
  - b. Smile and say, "I appreciate your feedback," then blow it off.
  - c. Complain to other colleagues about your critic's bad attitude.

If you answered "b" in all three scenarios, congratulations. You instinctively take the high road and avoid getting mired in petty arguments. If you answered "c," you're not necessarily willing to create a public firestorm, but you find ways to get in your digs. And if you answered "a," it's time to calm down and come up with a more effective way of dealing with conflicts.

# wisDoM

## Greatness

“There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one’s maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence, and a rejection of mediocrity.”

—Robert LeRoy “Buck” Rodgers,  
professional baseball manager

## Advice

“Successful men follow the same advice they prescribe for others.”

—Author unknown

## Profit

“The cumulative effect of micro-interactions is huge.”

—Sherry Sutton, career coach

## Adaptability

“My aim in life has always been to hold my own with whatever’s going. Not against: with.”

—Robert Frost, poet

## Balance

“A vision without a task is but a dream; a task without a vision is drudgery; a vision and a task is the hope of the world.”

—Wisdom discovered in a church in Sussex, England

## Expectation

“Engagement and commitment improve dramatically when employees know what is expected of them, and how they fit into the total picture.”

—Chris Gay, management consultant

## Disillusionment

“We all start jobs excited. And if you have a good boss, you’ve got a good job, for most of us. But more times than not, our expectations of the job aren’t met and over time we become more and more cynical, disenchanted, and eventually bitter. This is especially true if our boss is a jerk and we feel belittled and demeaned along the way.”

—Bob Nelson, president of Nelson Motivation, Inc.

## Risk

“No great deed is done by falterers who ask for certainty.”

—Mary Ann Evans (aka George Eliot), author

## Success

“A successful life is one that is lived through understanding and pursuing one’s own path, not chasing after the dreams of others.”

—Chin-Ning Chu, business author

## Ability

“It is a fine thing to have ability, but the ability to discover ability in others is the true test.”

—Elbert Hubbard, author and publisher

## Achievement

“Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.”

—Vincent van Gogh, artist

## Beginning

“Well begun is half done.”

—Aristotle, Greek philosopher

## Workers find it difficult to cut the cord (or ditch the battery)

Packing for a late summer vacation? If you're like many U.S. employees, you're taking along a laptop. A recent Associated Press poll found that 20 percent of workers take their laptops along when they go on vacation. Of those, many said they used their portable computers simply to check in with the office—40 percent to check their e-mail, and 20 percent to actively engage in work despite being off the clock. The primary reasons respondents gave for working while on vacation: They were expected to remain available, they were concerned about missing important information, or they enjoyed it.

—Adapted from “AP Poll: One in five vacations with laptop,” by Alan Fram, in the Associated Press

## Got housing?

Imagine that the best and brightest people in the nation wanted to work for you—but couldn't find an affordable place to live within reasonable commuting distance of your facility. The problem isn't so far-fetched, according to a new survey released by the Urban Land Institute (ULI).

Working with Harris Interactive, the ULI polled more than 300 employers from three groups: those with fewer than 50 employees, those with 50–100 employees, and those with more than 100 employees. The pollsters also surveyed more than 1,200 commuters nationwide with commutes ranging from less than 30 minutes to more than 90 minutes.

The employer portion of the survey found that organizations with more than 100 employees and those in the West were most concerned about a potential housing crisis. For instance:

- 55% of the largest employers surveyed reported a lack of affordable housing near their location.
- 67% believe lack of affordable housing is having a negative impact on retaining qualified entry-level and mid-level employees.
- 58% said they have lost workers due to long commute times.
- 69% believe long commute times increase employee stress.
- 63% believe long commute times trigger negative emotions among employees.
- 48% believe long commutes increase absenteeism.
- 46% believe long commutes contribute to higher turnover.

- 36% believe companies should be actively involved in providing employees access to affordable housing.
- 42% would be willing to participate in government-sponsored housing programs.
- 45% offer flextime options, and 21% offer telecommuting to reduce the time employees spend commuting to work.

The commuter poll found that:

- 57% of all commuters surveyed said they would be at least somewhat likely to move closer to work if affordable housing were available.
- 67% of those with household incomes of less than \$50,000 would be at least somewhat likely to move closer to work if affordable housing were available.
- 64% of those earning less than \$50,000 and 60% of those earning more than \$50,000 would consider making a lateral job move in order to shorten their commute.
- 76% of those aged 18–34 would consider a lateral move in exchange for a shorter commute.
- 85% of those who commute more than 90 minutes a day would consider a lateral move to shorten their commute.

—Adapted from “Lack of affordable housing near jobs: A problem for employers and employees,” on the PR Newswire

## Is your department suffering from “seasonal-absence syndrome”?

Have you noticed more workers calling in sick lately? If so, your department may be suffering an epidemic of “seasonal-absence syndrome”—workers calling in sick to enjoy a summer day at the beach or spa. According to a recent survey by Harris Interactive and Kronos, Inc., a workforce-management consulting firm, nearly 40 percent of full-time employees are guilty of calling in sick just to get a summer's day off. Most of the 1,077 respondents referred to their unscheduled time away from the office as taking a “mental health day,” with the days of choice typically falling on Monday or Friday.

So if workers are calling in sick when they're well, what are they doing when they're sick? According to an earlier Harris/Kronos poll, they're coming to work. An unbelievable 98 percent of respondents said they had gone to work sick, citing guilt about calling in, heavy workloads, or the desire to save sick time to use for personal reasons.

—Adapted from “How-to on workplace hooky; easy does it with the hooey,” by Al Lewis, in the *Denver Post*

# iNslights

## Silver linings

When your organization experiences a major shakeup, it's hard to believe things could turn out for the better. But you could take comfort from what happened when management guru Tom Peters decided to leave the Tom Peters Co.

You might assume losing the founder, the mentor, the name on the door would cripple the Cincinnati-based training and consulting company. Not so. It turns out that while Peters was busy becoming *the* name among management consultants, he wasn't necessarily doing a lot of consulting. When he departed in 2004, taking about 25 percent of the company's clients, those left behind simply took the opportunity to reinvent themselves.

Renaming the company Bluepoint Leadership Development, executives spent much of the first year visiting clients and persuading them to stay on board. Three years later, they've increased average monthly revenues 100 percent, easily topping what the firm earned when Peters was in charge.

—Adapted from “Leading! Without! Tom Peters!” by Francine Russo, in *Time* magazine

## Second chances

As a manager, you've learned that some problem workers can't be rehabilitated. But don't get discouraged. If you can help them find their passion, the unlikeliest people may turn around.

Jeffrey Henderson was an enterprising young man. By the age of 15, he was earning \$35,000 a week—selling crack cocaine. Then in 1988, Henderson's empire came crashing down when he was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison.

For most drug dealers, that would have been the end of the story. But not for Henderson.

Assigned to wash pots and pans in the prison kitchen, he soon tried cooking and discovered a knack for producing more than crack. He began reading up on food, cooking, and wine. After reading a *New York Times* article about top African-American chefs, Henderson, who is also African-American, knew he'd found his calling. Just before his scheduled release, he wrote Robert Gadsby, a chef featured in the article. Gadsby didn't respond, but Henderson wasn't deterred. Upon release, he immediately applied for work at Gadsby's Los Angeles restaurant—and was rejected. But he kept coming back, finally getting a try as a dishwasher.

Henderson's bosses soon promoted him to pastry cook, then line cook. Feeling he'd exhausted his opportunities

there, he took jobs at other top hotels and eateries. Within a few years, he headed for Las Vegas, but the Vegas chefs were put off by his prison record. Fearful of not being able to support his five children, Henderson challenged the culinary masters at Caesar's Palace to let him prove himself by preparing them a five-course meal. They accepted—and he was hired.

Within a year, Henderson became head chef at the Palace and in 2001 was named Las Vegas Chef of the Year by the American Food and Wine Tasting Federation. He also established the nonprofit Westside Group Teenage Awareness Program, joining other former gang members in visiting schools and detention centers to discourage kids from making bad choices. He wrote his memoir, *Cooked: From the Streets to the Stove, from Cocaine to Foie Gras* (William Morrow), and Columbia Pictures has purchased the film rights.

That's an impressive turnaround for someone most would have written off at 15.

—Adapted from “Former drug dealer has culinary success,” by Bill Maxwell, in the *St. Petersburg Times*

## Keen observations

Good managers trust their observations. But remember the adage: *Believe half of what you see . . .* Observations can be deceiving.

Take the mysterious case of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. After noticing that the 74-year-old justice seemed to take a long time getting to her feet following a recent hearing, ABC News reporter Jan Crawford Greenburg noted on her blog that it might be a good idea to start pulling together retirement files, just in case. As with so many things posted on the Internet, Greenburg's offhand observation shot across the Web, leaving pundits speculating about a possible change in the Court's balance of power. Shortly afterward, Greenburg posted a follow-up that the Court had said Ginsburg was “absolutely fine” and began pondering other explanations for her slowness (“Perhaps she'd turned her ankle during a strenuous workout”).

A few days later, *New York Times* reporter Linda Greenhouse came up with the real scoop: Ginsburg had been trying to find the shoe she'd kicked off under the table.

—Adapted from “The shoe beneath the table,” by Ellen Goodman, in the *Boston Globe*; and “Legalities,” by Jan Crawford Greenburg, on the ABC News Web site

## Want to build a winning team? Follow Lovie's example

In one respect, chance secured Lovie Smith's place in football history last year when he became the first African-American head coach to make the Super Bowl. As a result of game scheduling, his Chicago Bears won the NFC Championship just a few hours before Indianapolis Colts Coach Tony Dungy, also African-American, secured the AFC spot. But it wasn't chance that got Smith to the big game—it was management skill. And if you're trying to build a winning team, consider these lessons from Lovie:

- **Have a plan.** Smith wowed prospective employers three years ago when he arrived for head-coaching interviews carrying a detailed plan for building a successful team, including workout regimens, discipline policies, and step-by-step goals.
- **Support your staff.** Despite the Bears' success, Smith's young quarterback, Rex Grossman, frequent-

ly took a beating in the press for his sometimes erratic playing style. But the coach stood by his man, trying to give Grossman time to mature in the position.

- **Show, don't tell.** Forget the head coach as a sideline bulldog screaming in players' faces. Smith prefers teaching to ranting and does his disciplining off-camera. As he told the Elgin, Ill., *Courier-News*, "I don't think you have to downgrade guys and have to curse them out and things like that. I think what players want you to do is coach them. As much as anything they want you to teach them. We spend the majority of our time trying to do that."

—Adapted from "Management by Lovie: Tips culled from Smith's record, the Bears' season and the fans," in the *Register Star* (Rockford, Ill.)

## Communication Clinic

### Selling your message

You talk about your corporate mission. You offer motivation. You give instruction. You provide feedback. But then you wonder whether anyone's listening. Why does the wisdom you share seem to go in one ear and out the other? It probably has less to do with the quality of your message than with the method of delivery. If you want people to take your words to heart, say Chip Heath and Dan Heath, authors of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (Random House), you have to craft your message with these principles in mind:

- **Simplicity.** The more words you use to get your point across, the less people listen. Think about the core issue you're trying to convey, then share your message in the simplest possible terms.
- **Credibility.** Provide the necessary statistics, details, or examples to convince others of the truthfulness of your ideas.

- **Emotion.** Use the power of association to appeal to your listeners' emotions. Give them a reason to care or to believe that your message will serve their best interests.
- **Surprise.** Get attention by saying something unexpected or by sharing the usual information in an unusual way.
- **Storytelling.** One entertaining way to get your message across is by sharing stories about similar situations and their outcomes. When people can visualize themselves as the characters in your drama, they'll be more likely to remember—and act on—your message.

—Adapted from "Sticky situations," by Alfred A. Edmond, Jr., in *Black Enterprise* magazine

### Consider the cost when taking on new commitments

If your boss asked you to take on 20 additional projects to be completed by month's end, you'd balk. But if those projects were presented one at a time, you might take on the same impossible task without a second thought. Before saying yes to any request, review your schedule and make the necessary calculations to see whether you're biting off more than you can realistically chew.

—Adapted from "Time management worst practice: Always saying yes," on the Time Thoughts Web site

### Use benefits options to make employees feel empowered

One way to make employees feel they're directing their own careers is by letting them design their own benefits plans. Many organizations give employees the opportunity to individualize their options by selecting from a range of benefits offerings, and they also provide workers the online tools to calculate the value of their choices. Educating workers on how to manage their own healthcare and retirement plans can make them feel more in control of their work lives and their futures—and more loyal to the managers who helped them achieve their goals.

—Adapted from "Empowering employees; empowerment energizes," in *Employee Benefits*

### Embody your message when managing change

It's natural for you to feel uncertain when major changes occur in your organization. But it's imperative that you keep your darkest worries to yourself. Your attempts to calm the fears of your staff will fall short if workers sense that you don't believe your own message. While it's okay to honestly acknowledge and openly discuss legitimate concerns, it's not okay for workers to see you teetering on the edge of panic. Be aware of any negative vibes you may be sending out and remember that workers will attach great meaning to your simplest actions.

—Adapted from the NYS Forum Web site

**Confusing terms: Biannual or biennial?**

You're writing a business letter about an upcoming conference. So which term is correct—*biannual* or *biennial*? You're not alone in confusing these similar words. *Biannual* means twice a year, while *biennial* means once every two years. To make things easier, you could substitute *semiannual* for *biannual*. Or you could end the confusion altogether by skipping the impressive terms and simply saying the conference occurs twice a year or every two years.

**Lead by example to demonstrate commitment to diversity**

What's the best way to show your staff you're serious about diversity? Take a training course. In a recent survey of *Fortune* 500 CEOs, 100 percent of those polled cited the need for training to further diversity goals, and 90 percent of Diversity Inc.'s top 50 companies for diversity have mandatory diversity training for managers. But you don't have to wait for your organization to provide the necessary training. Pursue your own educational opportunities to improve your effectiveness as a manager of diverse workers and to demonstrate your commitment to creating an inclusive work environment.  
—Adapted from the Magazine Publishers of America Web site

**Keep drudgery from zapping new-employee enthusiasm**

Most new employees show up for orientation brimming with excitement—only to find their excitement waning as they spend hours filling out forms, signing documents, and reading policy manuals—or having a facilitator read the manual to them. A better approach is to mail written materials to workers so they can review them at home, or schedule a time for them to come in solely to do paperwork. Then you can devote orientation to helping them get started on their new duties.  
—Adapted from “In the trenches: Practical tips for new-employee orientation,” by Alicia Abell, on the Chronicle of Philanthropy Web site

## Make yourself indispensable in changing times

One minute you're a happy manager working for a midsize firm. The next your company has been swallowed by a large conglomerate. One minute you're employed by a stable organization. The next a terrorist attack or natural disaster has caused prices to plummet and put your job in jeopardy. Job security may be here today and gone tomorrow. How can you continue to remain employed and employable come what may? Remember these guidelines:

- **Make no assumptions.** Never allow yourself to be lulled into a false sense of security. Change is a fact of life. A new product line, a new senior executive, a failed project—you never know what unexpected events may alter your status. To survive and thrive, you must learn to be flexible and adaptable, able to roll with the punches.
- **Continue training efforts.** Just because you've found the job of your dreams doesn't mean you should stop trying to improve your skill set. It's essential—especially in this time of rapidly changing technologies—that you pursue continuing-education

opportunities so you can stay abreast of the latest equipment and methods.

- **Perform multiple functions.** Think about previous jobs or volunteer positions you've held. What did you learn from those experiences that you could bring into your current situation in order to enhance your value? Make yourself indispensable to your organization by learning to serve multiple functions.
- **Improve interpersonal skills.** Get involved in activities—on the job and off—that give you a chance to interact with a variety of people from different backgrounds, ages, and so on. It's easier for an employer to teach technical skill than interpersonal communication. The more adept you are at team-building and working effectively with supervisors, employees, and customers, the more valuable you'll be to the organization regardless of the circumstances.

—Adapted from “Overcoming ‘social buffaloes’ in the changing workplace,” by Vincent Muli Wa Kituku, on the Speaker Spotlight Web site

## Minimize your risk when managing telecommuters

It's challenging enough to manage workers and maintain security when employees are stationed 10 feet from your office. How do you protect your investments when workers are miles away? Follow these suggestions when managing telecommuters:

- **Provide additional training.** When workers telecommute, it can be difficult to determine whether you're truly getting the most from your human assets. To head off performance problems, consider providing additional training to off-site workers so they'll be better prepared to work through difficult issues without direct supervision.
- **Provide secure equipment.** When teleworkers send and receive proprietary information on nonsecure computers, the information is more

vulnerable to hackers. A better choice is to require workers to use secure equipment provided by the organization. That way, the equipment may include encryption mechanisms that will make it more difficult for hackers to gain access to sensitive data.

- **Provide clear incentives.** When telecommuters leave your employ, they may be remiss about returning equipment, securing confidential information, completing paperwork, and so forth. Take a proactive approach by arranging to go to their home and retrieve equipment and other work materials or by requiring them to bring in equipment and materials before they can collect their final paycheck.  
—Adapted from the *West Virginia Employment Law Letter*

## Adopt these rules to keep hourly employees on track

How long can you expect new hourly hires to remain on the job? About a month. Okay, so that may be an exaggeration, but it is true that half of the hourly employees who decide to desert the ranks do so within the first 30 days. How can you improve your odds of keeping them on the job long-term? By applying these management rules:

- **Explain needs.** All hourly jobs are not created equal, so don't assume workers who've held similar positions with other employers will be able to step in and do things your way without specific instruction. Devise an orientation program that clearly explains your policies, procedures, and expectations.
- **Show respect.** In one survey of hourly workers, 63 percent of respondents said the chief way to keep them motivated and on the job is by showing respect and making them feel valued. Examine your attitude. If you believe hourly workers are expendable and easily replaced, you'll wind up expending a lot of time, energy, and money replacing them.
- **Provide training.** Be willing to devote as many resources to training

hourly workers as you would to training salaried staff. When you help employees develop their skills, you create a more competent workforce and demonstrate that you truly value your workers.

- **Address performance.** Letting poor performance slide while continuing to dole out paychecks not only rewards negative behavior but also shows workers their actions have no discernible impact. Instead, empower hourly workers by adopting a policy of addressing negatives and rewarding positives. Workers will quickly learn they can control their circumstances by choosing to do their best.
- **Give recognition.** Research shows that for most hourly workers, public recognition is even more prized than pay raises. Look for opportunities to single out good performers in front of their peers. Implement recognition programs that give workers a chance to praise one another. And improve retention by celebrating service anniversaries.

—Adapted from “Express washing: Labor,” by Mike Matthews, on the Modern Car Care Web site

### Take these steps to make sure employees walk the team talk

Do your employees talk about teamwork in public while promoting their own agendas in private? Are they looking out for number one at the expense of the good of the team? Rick Brandon, CEO of the California consulting group Brandon Partners, says you can detect signs of a me-first mentality by taking these steps: First, spend plenty of time wandering around and observing how employees interact to determine whether there's a gap between public comments and private actions. Second, look for patterns of high turnover, which may indicate that workers aren't the happy team players they claim to be. And finally, use exit interviews and employee surveys to explicitly ask workers whether sabotage and backbiting are common problems and whether they feel office politics interferes with productivity.

—Adapted from “Management: Experts offer tips on curbing destructive office politics,” in *Managing Accounts Payable*

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Web site: www.managementresources.com

Mark Ragan, CEO & Publisher  
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**Use this trick when you are feeling demotivated**

Even dedicated managers occasionally feel burned out. But you can perk yourself up with this trick: Start thinking like a contractor. The company is not your employer but your customer. This exercise in role reversal can help you feel more empowered. Rather than doing what you have to do to get by, you'll begin thinking of new ways to enhance your value with your client. —Adapted from “The secret to workplace excellence,” by Jason M. Gracia, on the Motivation123 Web site

**Listen for these signs of an ineffective incentive program**

If yours is like most incentive plans, it rewards the top achievers based on the numbers they attain. But is that enough to sustain interest in the program among your entire staff? Find out by asking workers how they feel about your incentive offerings. If employees persistently comment that they'd like to see more—or different—people win awards, then your program may be too limited. Make sure your plan doesn't unintentionally demoralize workers by rewarding two or three top earners while making the rest feel it's impossible to crack the code. —Adapted from the International Customer Management Institute Web site

**Recruiting? Try these nontraditional outlets for hiring workers**

Running out of available job candidates? Consider searching off the beaten path. Local community outreach programs, faith-based organizations, and job partnerships may be able to help you connect with willing workers who've fallen on hard times. Organizations such as AARP and Seniors First may be able to put you in touch with retired people who would like to get back into the workforce. And groups such as the Center for Independent Living may be able to help you locate skilled workers who have disabilities. —Adapted from the Workforce Central Florida Web site

**Use this approach to limit workplace distractions**

Whether it's the *American Idol* finale, March Madness, the annual Super Bowl pool, or the presidential elections, you can count on workers occasionally becoming obsessed with outside events that have nothing to do with work. How can you keep their minds on their work? Management consultant Kevin Eikenberry, author of *Vantagepoints on Learning and Life* (Dog Ear Publishing), recommends playing the GAME:

- 1. Gauge their level of interest.** Yes, statistics show that workplace productivity tends to dip during the college basketball tournament or the day after the Super Bowl. But that doesn't mean your entire staff is going to take a mental powder. Will some people get overly caught up in the excitement of, say, *Idol's* final showdown? Sure. But others will simply shrug their shoulders and keep their noses to the grindstone. Don't assume the worst.
- 2. Acknowledge the potential distraction.** Talk to your staff about your concerns. Let them know you're worried that the big game will distract them from their duties. Tell them you share their excitement over the upcoming event but that you all must pull together to ensure your

enthusiasm for an outside interest doesn't undermine your ability to effectively do your jobs.

- 3. Motivate with high expectations.** Set a short-term goal—perhaps connected to a highly attractive reward—that will help keep your employees on task during this distracting period. If possible, try to connect the reward to the event. For instance, tell workers that if they can get the next shipment out by noon on Friday, they can take a half-day off on the Monday after the Super Bowl.
- 4. Enjoy sharing the moment with your staff.** Are you caught up in the same excitement that's distracting your staff? Then fess up and use the opportunity to bond with your employees. Create a themed celebration or incentive program that will give you all a chance to combine work and play for positive results. “As leaders we can't remove the distractions—the events will still occur,” Eikenberry says. “Our job instead is to do what we can to recognize and take advantage of the situation however we can.”

**Are you new to management? Avoid these missteps**

You've just been promoted to management and are looking forward to a bright future. Just take care that you don't invite any clouds to start raining on your parade. As a manager, you'll have to endure even more scrutiny than you did as an employee, not only from your supervisors but from direct reports who'll look to you for guidance. To ensure you continue to shine, avoid these pitfalls:

- **Taboo topics.** Next year we'll elect a new president, but no matter how passionate you are about your chosen candidate, politics remains one of

those subjects that it's best to avoid discussing at work. And add to that list religion, sexual fetishes, and other controversial topics.

- **Getting comfortable.** Becoming a manager is an important milestone, but don't assume it means you can relax. You must continue improving your skills, expanding your knowledge, nurturing your network, and raising your profile so you'll be ready when the next opportunity arises. —Adapted from “How to avoid career nightmares,” in *Human Resources* magazine (Australia)