

How do you keep staff motivated when budgets get squeezed?



Steve Benson, SR/WA
President
Universal Field Services, Inc.

From our point of view, motivation comes in as many different forms as we have employees. What stimulates and encourages one person may be completely different for another. Our company's leadership realizes that each employee has their own personal and professional motivators, and we strive to foster a work environment that encourages and supports their individual growth.

Since our employees are not contract agents, they receive a comprehensive benefits package that ensures employment continuity and a long-term perspective. We also provide professional development through a broad variety of in-house training activities and promote educational classes offered through IRWA and affiliate organizations. Our employees know that we have a vast range of diverse clients and understand that branching out and learning more about the many disciplines involved in the right of way profession only increases their potential and marketability.

As a nationwide company, maintaining good communications is essential in creating a feeling of community among our staff. We publish regular newsletters to keep our employees up to date with our ongoing projects, and offer encouragement and useful information for daily living. We also encourage our employees to be involved in community service projects of all kinds. This helps us to maintain perspective about how lucky we all are and supports the sense of "family" for which Universal is known.



Candy Spitzer
President
Spitzer & Associates, Inc.

As with other national right of way service companies, we work in an environment of constant change, where contracts end and new business opportunities emerge. Because we operate as a family, each employee is personally invested in the success of the company. As a result, staff motivation is rarely impacted by the ebb and flow of contract funding.

Recognizing that our staff is our best asset, we encourage them to contribute their ideas for improving efficiency, adding value for our clients, enhancing our professional services and expanding the business. Our company believes in cross-training, as it optimizes each employee's skill set and their marketability for expanded work opportunities. This goes a long way in diminishing their concerns and inspires them to advance in their career path.

We operate as a unified team, providing support and encouragement so that staff remains motivated to do their best. We believe that motivation is strongly rooted in open communication between management and employees, and because our management philosophy is grounded in appreciation rather than fear, we are able to effectively inspire our staff to the highest level of professional service. Our corporate values include respect for staff, our clients and the work we do.



Mark W. Bilyeu, SR/WA
 President
 Smith-Roberts Land Services, Inc.

Motivating employees in any climate can be a challenge, but it can be even more daunting during a recession or poor economy. Work dries up or slows down and attitudes sour, all of which can poison an office environment quickly. I have found that, aside from insecurity from the potential disruption of income, employees are always looking to invest in their own roles, retain their positions and perpetuate their careers.

We have always believed in cross training and augmenting our employees' skill sets during downtime. This is an ideal time for staff to gain valuable skills, increase their institutional knowledge, and cement relationships with coworkers, classmates and even potential clients. Employees typically feel inspired by learning a new skill, and when they bring this excitement back to the workplace, it adds even more value. Recognize excellence in cross training by awarding employees with a new job title or added subspecialty. If properly implemented, brief periods of cross training can blossom into a permanent mentoring program. Stirring up transferable talent can be infectious and help lead to a turnaround or the capture of available work in a lean market.

Ask employees to give a candid look at corporate inefficiencies. Management can be too close to the fire, and a new perspective can reveal areas that may need attention. Ask about their goals and accomplishments and have them set new goals for the year. Ask whether they have any community contacts that might translate into new work and if feasible, allow them time away from the office to grow these relationships. Similarly, if an employee has cultivated a relationship with a key client, make sure these connections are maintained.

Those who first sense work slowdowns are not normally shy when it comes to sharing their opinion. Regular communication with employees can help quell gossip and stop de-motivational doomsday rumors. Get staff to open up by asking their opinions regarding a way to overcome lean times. Chances are there are several housekeeping tasks that have gone unattended during boom times. From physical space issues to sensitive human resources issues, downtime may be the best time to reassess what really matters. Examine necessary costs. Shop and compare insurance programs. Ask employees what benefits are most important to them. Ask them to brainstorm efficiencies. By asking for their help, they will feel vested. It will give them a sense of ownership by being a part of a solution, and you may be surprised by what you learn.



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