



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### **Attack a Team Morale Problem on Many Fronts**

An interesting situation often occurs when new managers are assigned to a team. This could be a new project manager or a functional manager. There is a tendency for current managers to get into a routine regarding their staff, and this keeps them from seeing a slow downward spiral in morale. Sometimes they don't realize what is going on until people complain openly, or people start to quit.

When a manager takes on a new team, however, they typically meet with the staff as a group and also individually. During the meetings they ask questions about morale and about how people feel about their jobs. You start to see problems that the previous manager did not see. The prior manager may not have even realized that there were people problems, but as a newcomer, you could sense the situation quickly.

Morale problems don't happen overnight, and they cannot be resolved overnight. However, the place to start is with the type of meetings that will allow you to find the causes. Sometimes, the causes and remedies are out of your control. However, as the manager, there are some things that are within your control, and the higher up you are in the organization, the more control levers you have. You will find that the simple act of listening will help somewhat. Regardless of how much you can do, if the group sees you trying to help, they will feel better as well.

You need some feedback from the group to determine the cause of the morale problems, but here are some things to look for, and some ways you can help.

#### **Work is not challenging**

This is often heard on support teams. This is a tough one because, in most cases, your work is your work and you cannot change the basic nature of that work. However, there are some things you can do to introduce new challenges. For instance:

- Rotate people into new roles. If two people have done the same job for a long time, switch them. This gives each person an opportunity to learn new skills and new areas of expertise, while also giving you more backup coverage.
- Give people more responsibility. You may be able to increase the responsibility level for members of the team. This might include letting them track the budget for the team, putting people in charge of support activities for an application, letting new people manage the work of contractors, etc.

#### **Few opportunities to learn new technologies**

Again, if your group works with old technology, you may not have as many options. Some ideas are:

- Rotate people into new technologies. You can switch responsibilities to allow people to learn new skills, even if they are not cutting edge.



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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- Increase the training opportunities. People can keep up on new technologies through training events. You probably do not want to spend a lot of money on skills training that people cannot use. However, there are a lot of free opportunities. For instance, wireless technology is still fairly new, and there are many free (or inexpensive) seminars offered on an ongoing basis that team members could attend. You can also look for outside speakers to come in and talk about new technologies. In many cases, these speakers can be people within your own company.

### **People don't know what is expected of them**

This is one that is heard often, and it is normally directly within a manager's control. You need to examine people's performance objectives and make sure they are relevant to their jobs. If possible, these objectives should align up to department and division objectives as well. You should also make sure people are clear on what their job responsibilities are, what their current work activities are, and how their contributions fit into the larger picture from a project, team or department basis. You can also establish semi-yearly, or quarterly, review processes to make sure people understand your expectations in terms of performance, and where they stand.

### **Compensation issues**

Your options may be limited, but see if you have any flexibility. First, you can ask your Human Resource group to validate how your group is compensated versus similar roles within the company and in the marketplace. If it is in-line, then you can set that perception with your team. If it is, in fact, lower than it should be, see what your options are in terms of larger salary adjustments, one-time market adjustments, special bonuses, stock options, etc.

### **Offer intangibles**

In addition to resolving problems, you may have an opportunity to introduce more flexibility into the team environment, and give people more control over their jobs. Both of these are typically areas that will allow people to feel better about their work. These can also help alleviate morale problems that can occur with long periods of overtime. Examples of work flexibility include:

- Offer flextime options to allow people to work early or late. This could also include four ten-hour days, or 4 ½ 9-hour days.
- Try to offer some form of telecommuting. Look at one to two days per week to start, perhaps just with selected trial people.
- Make sure people have the right hardware and software they need to do their jobs. It is especially frustrating for IT people to be developing on slow equipment, especially when RAM, hard drives and other hardware are so cheap.
- Have more fun. Look for an opportunity for a social outing every month, even if it is just a lunch brought into the building.



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### Summary

As a new manager for a group, you have an opportunity to see things from a new perspective and put creative solutions in place. The ideas in this column give you a sense for what you can do. You can uncover other ideas as well. The important point is to note that you are responsible for the overall morale of your team. Regardless of the limitations that the work environment might impose, there are things within your control to help make things better.