

Ahoy! Layoff's Ahead!

Question:

I have been told repeatedly that project managers need to be good leaders. I have always been rather successful, but I've never really thought of myself as a strong leader. Now I have been told that we are going to have to lay off some staff members because of the poor economy. Of course, we still have the same work to do even though we have less staff. I'm afraid that if I can't find some way to motivate my team, I might have a full-scale mutiny on my hands! What can I possibly do?

Adrian

Answer:

Adrian

I wouldn't worry too much about the whole situation. It sounds to me like your company is not doing very well and I wouldn't be surprised to see you and your entire team out the door in a few more months. In the meantime I have some advice for increasing the morale of your team.

1. Stay positive. Your team is likely to get frustrated with the new situation, and it is conceivable that they might start fighting amongst themselves. No matter how fun it might look to get in there and throw a few proverbial punches, you must not involve yourself. Instead start to look at the glass as half-full. Remind your team that they still have a job and a paycheck - for now. You might be let go in the future but that is looking at the half-empty glass. Instead you can hope for a severance package when your time comes. That is more of a glass half-full approach.
2. Make sacrifices. Relax. I'm not talking about performing scary rituals and drinking blood. I mean that it is your job as project manager to lead by example. If you need your team to work late, you should stay late as well. Sometimes you'll notice that your employees will voluntarily choose to stay even after you leave, saying something like "We need to stay to fix all the mistakes that you made." Oh those wisecracking employees!
3. Remain calm. Much like staying positive, remaining calm will test your leadership and management skills. For the sake of the team's morale, I suggest all crying, screaming, and tantrum-throwing to be put on hold until you are alone in your office. Just mentally squeeze it all in your head until you find a good place to let it all out. If you notice holes being punched in the walls of the bathroom you know that others are taking my advice.
4. Find small victories. Look for some small victories such as people arriving on time to work, being positive for the day, going an entire meeting with no sarcasm, etc. It might not seem like much, but winning small battles can do a lot for a team's morale in the short-run.
5. Maintain a sense of humor. Hopefully you had one to begin with or else you're really out of luck. Everyone likes a comedian, right? When your team members approach you seeking reassurance, send them away with a hilarious comment about their hygiene. ZING! That will really get your spirits up (oh, and I'm sure the team will

appreciate it as well). If you do not have a sense of humor, try putting some “Weird” Al Yankovic songs on everyone’s iPod. That guy is HILARIOUS!

Now go out there and be competent!