

INVEST IN PEOPLE

DAVID T BINKS



When it comes to staff motivation, personal fulfilment is just as important as earnings, says **David T Binks**

As the nights start drawing in and memories of summer holidays fade, anyone who is involved in landscaping knows that for the next few months the weather is going to take a turn for the worse, and that keeping people motivated can take some doing. There is certainly no hard and fast rule on how to retain and motivate staff, but there are some well-researched models for getting people on board.

Unlike the Googles of this world, who tell you to take money off the table so that it isn't even a consideration, our margin-driven industry means that pounds, shillings and pence have got to be factored in. The offer of financial gain works well in the very short-term, but this carrot and stick motivation isn't sustainable, as each time a task is completed, a bigger carrot must then be presented. Focusing on extrinsic factors can lead to a less focused team with a more narrow-minded approach to working together, each concerned with their own goal rather than that of the business.

Ultimately, we need to work towards offering a healthy baseline, where wages, salaries and

other benefits are reasonable and fair; once this is established and these extrinsic factors are dealt with, the most powerful driver of all, the intrinsic motivators, can be identified. An easy exercise is to ask people (an appraisal is the ideal forum), "What do you want to be famous for?" – something that most of us were probably asked when we were in primary school; beyond the realms of childhood idealism, it doesn't get much more thought.

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The responses you receive from this one telling question give you a great insight into what makes an individual tick, and helps identify the purpose behind what they do and how they do it. The next step on from this is deciding on further training opportunities that will help individuals master their chosen profession (assuming that their ultimate aim is

to be a landscape professional!). Once these two factors have been tackled, the key to pulling these intrinsic motivators together is in giving individuals a sense of autonomy. Allowing people to make decisions for themselves reinforces their purpose and affirms their mastery of the position they are working in. Being

involved in ambitious and exciting projects also helps to maintain levels of interest.

This isn't to say that, when a large-scale planting or paving project needs an extra push to get it over the line on a weekend, offering a piece-rate for the work or some form of bonus is necessarily a bad thing – it serves its purpose. However, if you can get people to look beyond the short-term gains at the bigger picture of what you are trying to achieve, and see their place within that, it works on a much deeper level. So much of what we do in landscaping improves the lives of others, enhancing the environments people live in through greening grey spaces and creating habitats for wildlife to enjoy – there aren't many other jobs out there with effects that are so tangible and rewarding. If we can get people to look beyond their day-to-day tasks and see the huge upside in what they are doing, it will make their working life so much richer.

Before the clocks go back at the end of the month, it may be worth speaking with your team and discussing what would help them through the wet and windy months. Investment in good quality waterproofs and boots are essential, but outline some plans for the remainder of this year and for the year ahead, and make them feel involved in the business and the decision-making. It won't be an overnight flick of the switch, motivationally, but it will be a step towards a more engaged and positive team.

ABOUT DAVID T BINKS

David T Binks is managing director of Cheshire-based Landstruction, which was set up in 2010 and now has 30 employees. It has won Gold medals at RHS Chelsea and RHS Tatton Park. David also launched the Big Hedge Co., which supplies and installs mature hedging and topiary nationwide.

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