

31

Ways to Motivate Your Maintenance Department



Motivation amongst your employees can take a nose dive in the winter. Cold weather, mourning the end of the holiday season, and a lack of employee engagement are all factors in an un-motivated and perhaps under-performing work force. A report by the Incentive Research Foundation uncovered some seriously impressive, albeit, alarming statistics on overall employee motivation, finding that disengaged workers cost the US economy \$300 billion per year. In addition, it determined that organizations with above average levels of employee engagement realize 27% higher profits, 50% higher sales, and 38% above-average productivity. A motivated employee is also more likely to stick around which directly impacts profits as the report indicates that a 5% increase in employee retention generates 25% to 85% increase in profitability. With these truly staggering results in mind, it's a no-brainer to invest in tactics to better motivate employees, but not all managers know where to start.

In the case of the maintenance department, four primary factors attribute to the lack of incentive based programs or motivational tactics.



4 Reasons Why Maintenance Teams are Un-motivated

- 1.** The maintenance department is often one of the most under-appreciated and over-looked departments in an organization. Traditionally organizations view the role of the maintenance department as static, maintenance activities aren't innovative or changing, they instead stick to the status quo and cost the company money. This maintenance-as-a-necessary-burden mentality is both false and can hurt overall team morale. If your work is under appreciated, why would you work harder?
- 2.** Many of our clients come from the non-profit or government world, where channeling public funds for incentive-based spending on employees is strictly prohibited. Even if your maintenance manager wants to reward their top achievers, there are policies that prevent them from doing so monetarily.
- 3.** The size and autonomy of a maintenance department varies depending on industry, organization size, and business model. Many of the maintenance departments we work with are one or two (wo)man operations, so team building exercises or even instilling simple team comradery can be challenging and sometimes impossible. These small teams are often over-worked, with much of it going unnoticed by upper management.
- 4.** The aging demographic of the skilled trades workforce is of growing concern to facility and plant managers. Apart from having to fill vacant positions more quickly and the fear of losing years of internal knowledge as Baby Boomers retire, is the lack of buy-in from this age group on new innovative processes. The fear of unknown-technology or misconstrued ideas of losing their jobs from a tech takeover, make implementing automated processes

much more challenging. Recognizing this fear and understanding that many people don't take well to change, is an important first step to better motivate employees to jump on board with new ideas.

From the four constraints above, it may seem impossible to implement motivational tactics that fit within company guidelines and increase employee morale, retention, and profits. To deliver this tall order, we enlisted the help of our wonderful clients, the Hippo team, and some good old fashion research to come up with 31 ways to motivate your maintenance department. We hope our list provides you with some creative ideas and inspiration for your department. If you have others ideas not found on this list, please feel free to share in the comments section.

Motivation starts with solid leadership

Vast amounts of research and studies have gone into leadership styles and motivator tactics. There is a lot of literature on the do's and don'ts of leadership, so we've collected some specific leadership tactics that our clients seem to find helpful.

1. Work backwards, why aren't your employees motivated?



One tactic that a facility manager explained to us was to consider the rationale behind an employee's un-motivated attitude. [Facility Managers](#) need to be flexible in their style as a one-approach-fits-all mentality won't necessarily work for each member of your maintenance team. By better understanding why an employee is unmotivated and creating a structure to combat their individual challenges, employees will receive the specific tools they need to do their jobs better. Some workers may feel relieved that a [CMMS solution](#) is in place, while others may fear it. Through consistent communication you can hone in on the specific reactions and current mind frame of each worker. If you don't know where to start to motivate a specific employee, ask them. People are generally in tune with their own needs and can often discover solutions to their own problems if given the environment to do so.

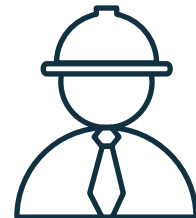
2. Promote schedule flexibility

Times have changed since the days when punctuality was the most important determinant of a good worker. This isn't to say that technicians should be allowed to come in 30 minutes late each day and leave whenever they want, but rather their work ethic, consistent meeting of deadlines, teamwork, and work quality should be the primary considerations of what makes a good employee. Being flexible with employee time shows workers that you trust them enough to get the work done and will not penalize an employee for coming in 5 minutes late or needing to leave early because their child is sick. It means empowering workers to meet their own timelines and that the biggest pressure they should face isn't that of a punch card, but rather the quality of their work. Be understanding of worker time, but make sure to set boundaries. If an employee is consistently late and is not meeting their targets, take them aside to determine why.



3. Tap into the natural leader

If you feel like you've lost control of your maintenance department or are struggling to identify with members of your team, try enlisting the help of a natural leader from your department. Natural born leaders are charismatic and often have good rapport with their fellow team members. Sometimes it can be difficult to balance the line between being both friend and manager to your team. Leveraging the pull of an employee who the rest of the group looks up to- usually a senior member of the team- can be very helpful in diffusing new policy changes or procedures. If the group sees the employee attending training sessions and working with new policies instead of against them, they are more likely to follow their example



4. Listen to your employees, their contributions are important



More often than not, people just want their opinions heard. Make sure your employees feel comfortable enough to come to you with issues and suggestions by assuring that their contributions are important. Ask their opinion frequently and try to implement employee suggestions whenever possible. Once employees see real change as a result of their feedback, they will be more likely to come forward with issues or positive comments. People on the ground floor often have more insight into trouble areas or improvements than management.

5. Show them what you've got



Words and meetings only go so far in showing your team a positive example. It's important to frequently teach by example and get in the trenches with the rest of your team. Working alongside your department is one of the best ways to review the proper procedure of a task and demonstrate that you're not above their "simple daily tasks". If you have a lofty target of work to be done, roll up your sleeves and work with them. Work orders will be completed faster, the quality of work will be better, and your team is much more likely to view a manager as just one of the guys (or gals).

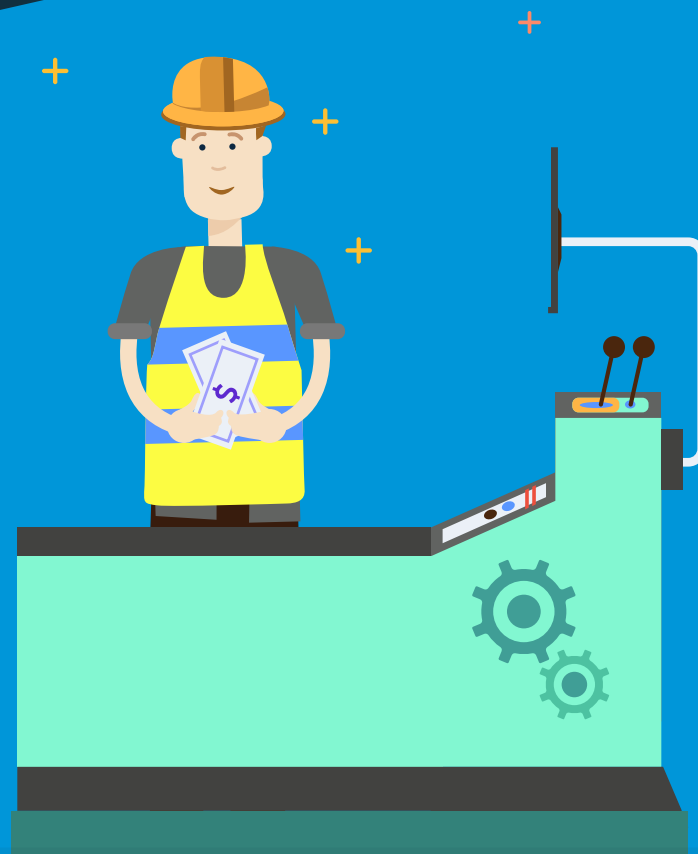
6. Reward good performance, more than pointing out the bad



Maintenance managers are busy people and when issues arise, the first reaction is to discipline employees for mistakes made. Change the conversation by pointing out positive feedback more frequently than bad. This requires more work than the reactionary style, where managers need to be constantly on top of the things that go right. You don't want to create an environment where employees are always fearful to speak with you, so make sure you focus on random occurrences of positive feedback instead of deliberate meetings to go over the negative.

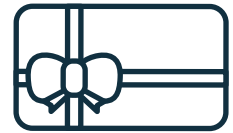
Apart from a simple pat on the back and verbal praise, we've put together a list of simple prizes that you can use to reward a job well done.

Gift incentives, the universal peace offering



7. Gift cards

An assortment of gift cards in small amounts can go a long way to reward a job well done. \$10 to Starbucks or the local coffee shop provides a reasonably priced incentive that goes over well amongst most crowds and provides a caffeine boost to boot. Other organizations provide a larger sum on a pre-paid visa card so that employees can choose exactly where they want to spend their reward. The trick here is that you should choose a spot based on its popularity amongst your team.



8. Dish out your company travel points

If you travel often for business, chances are you've racked up a few (thousand) travel rewards points on company or personal credit cards. Depending on company policy, use these points to buy pre-paid visa cards, gifts, or even divide the points themselves amongst your team.



9. Reward programs or point systems

This one can get a little complicated, but by laying out the program framework, it can be a lot of fun. The basic idea of these programs is that your employees earn points for a job well done, each point is added to the employee's total, and when they accumulate enough points they receive a prize. You must determine criteria for receiving points such as completing all assigned work orders on time over the course of a month, or if an employee stays late to help out another. Some organizations allow you to save up points over a long period of time to eventually cash in for a bigger prize such as a new set of golf clubs or a BBQ. If that seems a little lofty, stick with the gift card idea from above.



Instill autonomy in your maintenance team

10. Make them solve their own problems

A bit of tough love never hurts, especially when it helps employees to have confidence in themselves. An employee is automatically more invested in their workplace if they feel a sense of ownership over their job. Encourage employees to solve problems on their own so that when a task is completed they are the ones who receive credit for their own success. Ownership indicates that you trust your employees enough to make decisions and carry out projects without micro managing.

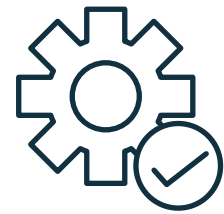


11. Cleanliness is next to... motivation?

Furthering the importance of instilling ownership in employees is to institute cleaning policies to ensure workspaces are tidy and functional. Studies show that workers are more productive in cleaner environments and it enforces a sense of ownership over their work area as well as providing a safer environment for employees.

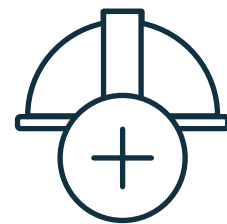


12. Give them the authority to make purchasing decisions



One client we spoke with gives their maintenance team the authority to purchase equipment and services such as collecting bids from outside contractors or researching latest equipment models for replacing older ones. Empowering employees by giving them higher level projects and handling part of the budget, shows that you trust their judgment and professionalism. After the employee brings their final recommendations to you, debrief their experiences and take their recommendations seriously. You'll be surprised how diligent and thoughtful these recommendations will be.

13. Invest in your employees- safety gear



Your employees work hard and experience a lot of wear and tear on their safety gear including goggles, steel toe boots, gloves, and flame retardant uniforms. If your company doesn't already, make sure you carve out money in the budget to update these items annually. Provide each employee with a budget of around \$200 to spend on work gear that needs replacing. This incentive works two fold, first it creates a safer environment for your maintenance team and second by receiving new items that they chose, employees feel more empowered to make decisions.

14. Invest in your employees- give them technology to do their jobs better



CMMS or [facility management software](#) can be a godsend for your maintenance department. This software specializes in streamlining maintenance and facility processes to make your entire department much more cost efficient. In addition to streamlining communication between your maintenance team and management (see motivator # 19), it also provides time saving methods such as a mobile app to reduce downtime between jobs and [preventive maintenance](#) work orders that generate at a frequency of your choice. Maintenance and facility software is always designed with the end-user in mind, showcasing a user-friendly interface for people of all technical skill levels to use. With maintenance management software, workers spend less time on administrative duties to find, sort and file existing [work orders](#) and more time completing maintenance tasks. For more information on the benefits of CMMS software, [read our post here](#).

15. Appoint a project leader

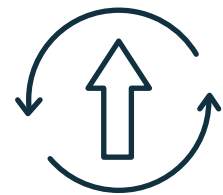


This motivator comes from a client submission, stating that “supported empowerment tends to be motivational.” Push project responsibility downward and empower your workforce by appointing project leaders to manage specific tasks. These people are the go-to point person for check-ins and follow-ups. Warning: This should not be misconstrued as a reason for upper management to slack off on the role of experienced oversight, but rather a way to empower employees in a supported framework.

Improve communication amongst your maintenance team

Communication is a key component of every facility or plant manager's job description. The trick is providing thoughtful and helpful feedback that encourages their employees to succeed. The following tips describe communication strategies to better motivate your maintenance department.

16. Regular performance appraisals



Continuous feedback in a structured environment is invaluable for your maintenance team. Make sure you take the time to have formal performance appraisals with each team member to discuss their work performance, attitude, work challenges, etc. Carve out an adequate amount of time for the discussion (up to an hour) and make sure you spend most of the time listening instead of talking. Start the meeting off with questions posed to them such as “How do you think you’ve been doing?”, “What are the challenges you face?” and “How can I help?”. By turning the meeting into a conversation rather than an interrogation or lecture, employees will feel more open to discussing important issues or provide in-depth feedback for the organization. The key is to have frequent appraisals on a quarterly or semi-annual basis so that issues are discovered early on or positive reinforcement can be given on a timely basis. If the appraisal isn't going to have a wage or salary boost associated with it, let them know ahead of time so they're prepared.

17. Share feedback in the moment

Pats on the back and well wishes of a job well done are important feedback tools for your employees to receive. Another important component of this feedback is the frequency in which it occurs. It is important to provide continuous feedback, but also to make it relevant for the employee. Provide feedback in a reasonable timeframe of its occurrence so positive feedback is rewarded on a timely basis and also to ensure employee challenges or issues can be resolved quickly once mentioned. Sharing in the moment doesn't necessarily have to be face-to-face (although you should consider this one of the best forms of communication), emails, texts, and news boards are all good communication channels depending on the content of the message.



18. Share feedback from other sources than yourself

Although feedback from a direct manager is important, when positive feedback comes from customers, vendors, or their own team it can be even more motivating. Peer-to-peer motivation helps others feel supported by a team and shows them that their work is recognized and valued. One client we spoke with collects comments from customers and co-workers each month and shares these messages over a mass email to the entire group. Their successes are highlighted to their peers by their peers, making the email both anticipated and thoughtful.



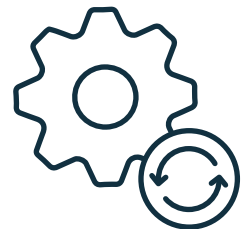
19. Use the help of automated processes to improve communication



Maintenance management software offers an integrated platform for facility and plant managers to inform one another about work order statuses and important tasks.

[Work order](#) input fields, such as open text comment sections to communicate challenges a technician is experiencing with a work order, task checklists to provide a step-by-step guide of how to approach a given project, and the work order status dropdown to easily tell managers the current stage of a specific work order, integrate together to send real-time information to a facility manager. Web-based maintenance software allows for information to be updated and relayed across the entire system immediately, so managers and maintenance technicians are alerted of work order progress instantaneously. This provides a non-invasive way for managers to check in on their team without having to search for the information.

20. Mediate maintenance department change



Change can be scary for anyone, be it a change in job description or a new complicated process that an employee is “forced” to use. Often times, change is a top down approach and the people who make the decisions aren’t the same people affected by these new policies. In an aging maintenance workforce, change often takes the form of new technological processes that are unfamiliar to a team used to working with manual methods. If new methods are pushed through without the consultation of the team, interest may wane and user uptake reduced. The point here is not that new processes should be avoided by departments, nor that every strategic decision be run past an entire team, but rather your maintenance team should be alerted in advance. In the case of CMMS, successful implementation of the software starts

with buy-in from an entire team as maintenance management software is only as good as the data inputted. It is important to communicate the various benefits of a system such as a mobile app allowing maintenance workers to access their work orders in the field without having to shuffle through paper. It also keeps them more organized and reduces downtime between jobs. To learn more about the benefits of work order management, [read our article here](#). Remember to mitigate fears about departmental change by explaining the benefits of any decision made. Your team has important insight into features that a reputable CMMS software should have, so don't disregard their objections.

21. Invest in continuous learning

Knowledge is the key to success. An informed maintenance staff can do their jobs more efficiently and feel more invested in their organization. This helps to increase employee retention and creates an environment where employees shift from maintenance workers to specialists in their field. Invest in training sessions on current industry practices, encourage workers to read articles, blogs and forums about new machine processes, and carve out room in the budget for employees to take evening or distance education courses. Education should be continuous, as employees can always use a refresher on best practices. Make sure courses are aligned with job roles and that they provide value to both the employee and employer.



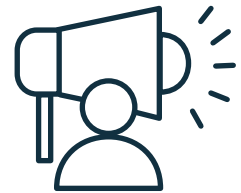
22. Instill a team mentality

As mentioned in motivator #18, peer-to-peer evaluation is an important feedback loop to have. In addition to this, instilling a team mentality amongst your workers will create a more unified department. When your employees collaborate on projects and feed off of peer-to-peer expertise, you will find yourself doing less “managing” and more mentoring. One client we spoke with empowers employees to work together by giving the department full control on different projects within a team framework. He provides the group with a report of all the machinery that needs to be fixed and a supplemental task checklist. It is the group’s responsibility to divide and conquer the listed projects. If an employee isn’t sure how best to approach their task, they are to work with the group to come up with a viable solution. The manager is always there to provide insight or guidance, but the team completes the bulk of decision-making. He finds this gets the job done much faster and the team enjoys the control they have over their own work.



23. Get to know your employees

This tip may not be an overly original one, but you would be surprised by how many managers fail to truly get to know the members of their maintenance team. Many teams are smaller in size and the people on them work quite independently of one another, providing a less than ideal environment to learn about a person’s life outside of the facility. Getting to know your team doesn’t have to involve weekend work retreats, but rather simple small talk over their family, friends, and hobbies. Connecting with the people that you manage builds trust and strengthens your work relationships. These aspects are important in improving workplace communication.



Connect with your team through team activities

Team activities or deliberate team hangouts are great ways to get to know your team. Need some inspiration for team outings? Our low cost motivators below are sure to appeal to your maintenance team.

24. Lunch time hangout

When we asked our clients what facility managers use to motivate their employees, a large number said they provide lunch for their team a couple of times a year. These lunches are inclusive of the entire team and provide a comfortable setting to hang out and get to know the people you work with. Note that work talk is not allowed as this isn't a meeting or a time for office gossip. One client thought it was important for their team to have a change of scenery and re-locates their lunches outside for a picnic. Getting out of the office and exploring new public spaces can break up an otherwise average workday. In addition, taking breaks outdoors provides a significant energy boost, allowing employees to re-charge and be more productive. If lunch seems like a large commitment, try an afternoon coffee break with the team. The trick is bringing people together over universal staples- lunch and coffee.



25. Lunch and learn

On the other hand, lunch and learns are a great way to educate your employees on a specific topic such as safety standards or quarterly goals. Not to patronize your team or trivialize an important meeting, but employees are more likely to be interested in a topic or look forward to a meeting if there is free food involved. As long as you have a clear agenda, leave some time at the beginning for employees to sit down and serve themselves, and at the end for cleanup, these meetings aren't a burden to host or distracting to the team.

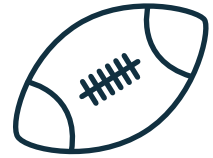


26. Celebrate the holidays/end of the year

No matter your religion or cultural background, creating a special time for your team to celebrate the end of the year is important to help reduce employee burnout. Towards the end of a year employee vacation days and benefits (like chiropractor services or dental) are depleted, increasing the likelihood of fatigue and dissatisfaction. Although many organizations already have companywide holiday parties, taking time to celebrate your own department and their achievements is a nice way to cap off a successful year or reflect on challenges your team faced. A holiday “happy hour”, extended lunch provided by the company, or Secret Santa can go a long way in providing a casual year-end get together.



27. Enter a sports league



Nothing says team comradery like sports. If you have aspiring pro-athletes on your maintenance team, consider joining a recreational league that gets together once a week to play. Slow-pitch, hockey (I had to mention it, we're Canadian after all), flag football, bowling, or even a pool league are really fun activities that people can easily rally behind. If your maintenance team is smaller, look to bowling or pool leagues that require less people. Participation doesn't have to come from playing, some employees may be more interested in being a spectator. Make sure you extend the invite to everyone so they can cheer on their fellow co-workers.



28. Department “Happy Hour”

If you and the team have been meaning to go out for a few after work beers, now is your chance. Institute a happy hour a couple of times a year where, depending on company policy, you can buy a case of beer for the office or visit your local watering-hole. Be sensitive to those who don't drink alcohol and make sure you provide non-alcoholic refreshments or visit a place that has food as well as drinks. Make sure to keep this time casual but professional, by ensuring that the conversation is flowing more than the drinks. Be responsible and have fun, enough said.



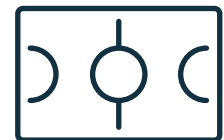
29. Team Volunteering

A great way to give back and also hang out with your maintenance team is to volunteer. Many organizations have a companywide volunteer day where they team up with a local not-for-profit during business hours and help out. There are all kinds of volunteer options out there, but to get buy-in from your team choose an opportunity that resonates with them. This can come in the form of a locally based initiative that would directly benefit their community or a maintenance specific task where they can show off their jobs skills for a great cause. If your team can't spare precious business hours, you can still help by pooling money together to donate to a charity of your choice.

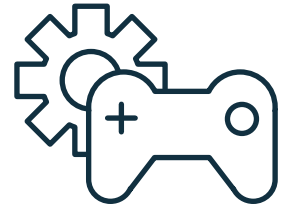


30. Go to a game

Put on your team jersey and face paint and go to a sports game with the team. You can often get ticket discounts when you book in larger groups or purchase tickets for less expensive amateur leagues. If getting everyone to a game sounds too difficult or costly, make a point to watch the “big game” at a bar or even stream it live at the office. Rallying around a particular intense match is a fun activity that most people can easily get behind.



31. The gamification of maintenance repair



Unleash your competitive side when you gamify an everyday work task. Competitions such as the first one to complete the task checklist on the air handler unit, or the person who completed the most amount of work orders for the week are crowned winner. You could incentivize the game with a prize or rely on good old fashioned bragging rights.



CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, your maintenance department is comprised of hard-working people, so the old adage of “treating others how you want to be treated” is always applicable. There are a variety of ways that maintenance managers can harness workplace efficiency and institute a positive work environment for all employees no matter their inner motivations. What’s important to takeaway is that a blanket approach to troubleshoot all employee issues at once is impossible, and what might work well for one employee may not see the same results for another. Use a mix of techniques and approaches to optimize the motivation amongst your entire team. Aim to inspire leadership in each individual, empower them with tools to make their jobs easier such as the latest CMMS software or equipment, and provide constant feedback on a group and individual level. Note that change may not occur immediately and that trust is earned over time.

If you have a technique to [motivate your staff](#) that is not mentioned on this list please add it to the comments section. We’d also love to hear of your implementation stories!

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