

3 tips to boost employee productivity

By Arnoux Maré

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Companies are facing a significant rise in absenteeism and presenteeism, as employees buckle under the pressure of a difficult economic environment and growing financial strain.



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While absenteeism refers to regular absences from work as a result of health issues, personal problems, or even without good reason, presenteeism refers to staff being physically present, but disengaged from their work.

These trends are increasingly threatening company bottom lines through lost productivity as South African employees navigate a turbulent environment.

Rising costs of living and economic pressures, compounded by the mental toll of disasters such as the pandemic, riots and the recent floods in KwaZulu-Natal, are placing an incredible burden of stress on staff.

In turn, this raises the risk of demotivated and disengaged employees, a negative work culture, and much higher levels of

both absenteeism and presenteeism just when companies need productive, motivated staff the most to see them through these tough times.

According to Statistics South Africa, absenteeism already costs the local economy some R16bn per annum. While the cost of presenteeism is more difficult to quantify, researchers at the Victoria Institute of Strategic Economic Studies have further estimated that the growing toll of lost productivity resulting from absenteeism and presenteeism could shave as much as 7% from South Africa's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030.



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Strategies

Companies need to be proactive in implementing proactive staff management strategies to minimise risk to their operations and maintain their competitive advantage.

However, many companies don't have the dedicated human resource and labour relations expertise needed to ensure that staff are satisfied and productive. Additionally, hiring this expertise can add significant costs, and distract from a company's core competencies and services.

This is why we strongly recommend outsourcing as an approach – even for companies with large staff contingents.

Strengthening employee engagement

In addition to outsourcing, I recommend a “back to basics” approach for businesses looking to strengthen employee engagement and halt a slide in productivity, beginning with a focus on these three fundamentals:

1. Offer competitive incentives

Many businesses overlook the importance of incentives for productivity and motivation. But where competitive salaries are important, this goes far beyond monetary rewards.

Organisations also need to consider benefits such as pension funds and medical aid schemes. These are often more cost-effective than retirement annuities or individual medical aids, alleviating some of the financial pressure from employees and improving overall staff well-being.

2. Provide learning and advancement opportunities

Opportunities for career advancement through upskilling and training are also key to cultivating a positive and focused workforce.

The benefits of offering learning opportunities to employee are two-fold. First, it shows that you care about them and their careers as individuals, making them feel valued and building loyalty to your company as well as reducing staff turnover. Secondly, well-trained staff are less likely to be involved in accidents or make mistakes, minimising waste or harm to your business while driving productivity and profits – a win-win.

3. Seamless staff management and support

Efficient employee onboarding, or ensuring that all new staff are provided with details regarding company policies and expectations, can play a significant role in creating a lasting positive impression of your company. Likewise, getting the basics right - such as effective administrative and payroll management - can greatly improve employee experience.

Seamless employee support can also make companies stand out as employers of choice, providing employees with swift solutions to any issues that may arise and removing the burden of any problems encountered, allowing them to focus instead on their work.

Finally, fostering an open and honest culture through ongoing communication is vital to ensuring that employees remain engaged, informed, and inspired.



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Staff are ultimately a company's greatest asset, ensuring that businesses run efficiently and that they continue to deliver high standards of service. In a difficult environment, it's more important than ever for leaders to prioritise the needs of their staff in order to secure and grow their businesses.

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