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How can I boost team morale?

The wellbeing of our teams is more important than ever. **Abi Rimmer** asks experts how we can boost our colleagues' morale

Abi Rimmer

Promote small acts of kindness

Heidi Edmundson, emergency medicine consultant, says, "It's important to remember that looking after morale is not the same as making people happy. So, focus on creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their feelings freely and without judgment. Model this and be open about how you're feeling too.

"Confronted by the enormity of the current situation, it's tempting to do nothing as most things seem futile. It really is a case, however, of small things repeated regularly. There are lots of little things that people really appreciate, like saying 'well done.' Although we might feel like we do this all the time it's never as much as we think, so we need to exaggerate these behaviours. You can never say thank you too often.

"Focus on bonding the team at the start of shifts. Create simple rituals such as getting everyone to say their name and take their mask down to show their faces. Rituals work as they create a constant which is reassuring and comforting. Put time and energy into creating a culture of care. Promote small acts of kindness and acknowledge their importance.

"Check up on anyone who has recently had a difficult shift or been unwell themselves. Before people go home get them to say three good things that they've done. Everyone is doing so much good stuff but it's easy for it to get lost. It's important to send people away with a few positive memories of the day even if they are mixed up with difficult ones."

Encourage colleagues to get to know each other

Amrita Sen Mukherjee, portfolio GP, wellbeing coach, medical educator at King's College Hospital Medical School, and RCGP First5 wellbeing lead, says, "How can we consider boosting team morale when we're working in such stressful, tiring, and overwhelming circumstances? In fact, it's as important to think about our team members as it is to think about our own wellbeing during times of crisis. I've found some strategies that may help support team working during these difficult times.

"I'd recommend huddles—regular meetings where teams can check in with one another. They should give each member the opportunity to share something positive about themselves from the past week or so. As humans, we thrive on meaningful interpersonal connections. Sharing something personal can support us in feeling connected and engaged with one another. It's also a great way for colleagues to get to know one another. I recommend rotating who leads

the huddle in order to encourage collective leadership.

"Good leadership is vital for team morale and it can be a behaviour demonstrated by any team member, regardless of their role within a team. A leader can encourage positive working relationships through role modelling, developing trust, and rapport.

"Compassionate communication is also key. Asking a colleague a simple question about their welfare such as, 'How are you feeling today?' and paying attention to their answer can encourage the development of a compassionate culture. Taking an active interest in each team member personally and professionally allows them to feel supported, valued, and respected. This in turn promotes and embeds a culture that fosters psychological safety and empowers team members to express their vulnerabilities when in need.

"Finally, celebrate strengths. Encouraging teammates to celebrate the individual strengths of their colleagues and honouring team 'wins' supports the development of individual and team effectiveness, improves relationships by increasing a sense of belonging, and improves our feeling of control."

Show genuine appreciation for them

Camille Gajria, GP and academic tutor at Imperial College London, says, "From a more light hearted perspective, food and drink such as coffee, pizza, and, on a hot day, ice cream can be immediate morale boosters. Lunches at team meetings may no longer be possible but some people have ordered takeaways for virtual team meetings so that everyone can eat together. Regardless of the nutritional value, it's the thought that counts with these gestures of care for each other.

"There are plenty of non-culinary options too. As the days grew darker this winter a partner at my GP practice—being aware that several of our staff come from cultures that celebrate festivals of light—bought candles for everyone. Other practices have put measures in place that go beyond the regulatory requirements to keep staff safe, such as helping with laundry. In both examples, context is key.

"Boosting morale is not just about material things. Often showing genuine appreciation of someone's efforts can have a huge impact. This can be done verbally or in writing with a specific example.

"Trust and fairness are the foundations of sustaining morale in the long term. Really listen to your colleagues—this means seriously considering their concerns and ideas. It will help them to feel safe,

enjoy work for the work's sake, and gain some semblance of control, even in difficult times.

“It can be hard to do some of these things if you're not in charge of your team but we can all try to model these values. This four minute video¹ shows how to go beyond words to implement morale boosting actions that don't cost the earth and create better outcomes for everyone.”

¹ Bush MC. This is what makes employees happy at work. TED. December 2018. www.ted.com/talks/michael_c_bush_this_is_what_makes_employees_happy_at_work.