

Who's Your CMO (Chief Morale Officer)?

HINT: Look in the Mirror!

by Craig Harrison

Much is asked of leaders during trying times. They must remain focused, calm and optimistic. They need a steady hand, nerves of steel, vision that can see far beyond the horizon and navigate it diligently. Among the hats leaders at many levels wear, one is that of CMO — chief morale officer.

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines morale as:

- The mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand;
- Alternately, a sense of common purpose with respect to a group (esprit de corps):
- Lastly, the level of individual psychological well-being based on such factors as a sense of purpose and confidence in the future.

As a leader you have influence over the morale of your team, group, department or organization. How are you wielding yours?

More Than A Cheerleader

Many people regard morale as the domain of cheerleaders. Rah-rah cheers and exhortations. platitudes and slogans:

- You Can Do It!
- Be Your Best!
- Your Attitude Determines Your Attitude!

I beg to differ. Morale is much more complex than platitudes and tag lines, slogans and speeches. A Chief Morale Officer has many responsibilities.

Take Their Temperature!

What is the pulse of your group? How is morale? Are people depressed? Lethargic? Confused? Leaders need to know the sentiments of their team on a daily basis. And it can't be determined from the safety of your office. You need to be on the ground, in the trenches, talking to employees and managers on a regular — or in some cases daily — basis. You've heard of management by wandering? Your goal: morale-building by wandering.

Steady At The Helm

As you assess the mood of the team, understand the psychology of your employees, and appreciate the tenor of the times. Layoffs, foreclosures, evaporating 401K plans. Employees are insecure, uncertain and overcome with doubts about their future, their family's, as well as their organization's. Knowing this, you can quell their fears, instill confidence in them and provide stability — through your words and actions. Exhibiting a steady hand, a calm demeanor and quiet confidence will similarly allay the fears of your employees, who look to you for cues. Be a voice of reason. You're their lighthouse in the storm. May your light shine unwaveringly.

Communication Quells, Calms and Connects

Uncertainty in the workplace doesn't just affect morale. It slows productivity and often feeds on itself. Rumors spread; worst fears are entertained. "Not" knowing the status of a team or group, project or initiative, is unhealthy. As a leader you need to keep employees apprised of situations. You need to be available and accessible to answer questions, allay fears and focus (or re-focus) the team. Regular communication, whether through meetings or social gatherings, maintains and also builds morale. Be a communicative leader!

Who Motivates the Motivator?

There will be times you, the motivator, may need motivation. That's to be expected. You need to recognize times when you're depressed, burned out or otherwise not at your best. Need a shot in the arm? There are counselors and coaches, support groups and your own personal network of professional resources to draw upon. Understand the importance of maintaining your own resiliency and ability to shoulder the needs of your group.

Leaders: Windows to the Soul of an Organization

It's said you can tell a lot about a company by the people it keeps. I believe leaders to be the windows to the soul of organizations. Leader who are dour, negative or waiting for the next shoe to drop adversely affect an organization's morale.

Conversely, leaders who are successful Chief Morale Officers disproportionately affect morale. There's no moral to this article...just morale. It's time you lead! Flex your motivational muscles and give your organization the morale it needs. As CMO you are now the provider of choice of your employees!