



## **Employee Motivation, Don Imus, and Team Building-5 Secrets to Creating Successful, Motivated Teams**

By Ed Sykes

Don Imus, a shock jock (someone who shocks their listening audience by saying outrageous statements), was fired from his jobs on WCBS radio and MSNBC television for crossing the line of decency and making racist and sexist remarks regarding the Rutgers University women's basketball team. From a team building and employee motivational point of view, there are tidbits of motivational wisdom to be learned from this situation.

First, let me ask you, how many "Don "Imuses" do you have in your organization, your team, or your department? You know what I mean, the employees, whether they are women or male employees, who continuously cross the line when it comes to behavior; perhaps being overbearing or the bully at work. They make insensitive comments without respect for other people's feelings, and then say the following when you discuss their conduct:

"I'm just being me."

"That's just the way I am."

"I was just playing."

"I didn't hurt anybody."

"Oh, you're just too sensitive."

"Can't you take a joke?"

"I didn't mean anything by it."

Yet, they proceed to exhibit this inappropriate behavior. Because of this "Don Imus" behavior, productivity decreases, employees are less motivated, transfers and personnel issues increase, and soon you stop accomplishing your goals. Bottom line is that these kinds of people can tear apart your organization and team with their words or behavior.

The following are five secrets to handling the “Don Imuses” on your team so that you keep employee motivation high, build a strong, self-directed team, and achieve a higher level of organizational success

**Live Your Mission** – When you continuously communicate and act upon the organization's mission, values, and goals, your employees will be motivated to live the mission and maintain a high standard of behavior and productivity. This communication must start at the top and be communicated and acted upon at every level at every opportunity.

One of your organization's top values should be—respect. When you allow an employee to disrespect other team members through words or actions, you are not living your organization's mission, which will lead to organizational and team turmoil, productivity issues, and possible harassment issues.

We know when working with top organizations, the more organizational values are communicated and reinforced, the more success the organization will achieve. This creates a motivated work environment and rewards employees based on the mission. **Be Consistent** – Whenever you observe this bad behavior, you must address it each and every time. Many times I will hear managers say, "Well, they just said it once" or "It will go away eventually." Well, it doesn't go away. By not addressing this inappropriate conduct each and every time, you enable or empower the individual expressing this behavior. Your "Don Imus" person is thinking, "Well, no one said anything, so it must be acceptable," or "If I can get away with this, then let me overstep the boundaries even further." All the while the other employees, who are conducting themselves in a positive manner, are less motivated to produce. They will retreat to a safe environment where they won't need to communicate with this person and communication fundamental to a successful work environment ceases.

**Be consistent each and every time!** Have the courage to conduct a private coaching session with the "Don Imus" personality and explain what is acceptable communication and behavior each and every time. Explain in detail what the reward for good employee behavior is and the penalty for continued bad employee behavior. Remember **That Words Hurt** - "Sticks and Stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me" is the phrase many of us heard growing up. Well, words do hurt. The best advertising copywriters, political experts, speech writers, and screen writers are paid millions of dollars to create emotions with words so that we are persuaded to act in certain and various ways.

Realize that once we say something that is hurtful or can alienate our fellow employees, we can never take it back. Or, as the old expression goes, "It's hard to get the horses back in the barn once the door is opened."

We should all be careful with the words we use. You might ask yourself the following:

Is my language positive or motivating toward my fellow employees?

Am I showing respect toward my team members with the words I use?  
Do the jokes I use uplift or motivate or tear down and de-motivate my team members?

Note: Always use honest communication that respects the recipient of your message. When you are "frank" (Let me be frank with you...), this means you are giving an opinion at the expense of the person receiving your "frankness." Let's leave "frank" out of our conversation and be more honest and respectful. **Motivate Towards Good Behavior** – Always encourage positive, motivating behavior and recognize good behavior whenever you can. Recognize the person(s) exhibiting positive behavior in team meetings, a memo, or letter from the vice president, etc.

Most of all, your employees will emulate the behavior you show. Always be on your best motivating, respectful, and positive behavior. When it comes to behavior as a manager, you receive what you send out. **Be Prepared to Take Corrective Action** – If you have a meeting and/or coaching with the employees that are exhibiting the "Don Imus" behavior and they choose to continue with their inappropriate behavior, it's time to take action. Make sure that you, as the supervisor or manager, document, document, and document all discussions relating to this unacceptable behavior. Confer with human resources to receive expert advice on the next steps in the corrective action procedure. Remember, you are never alone when dealing with this kind of employee. Then start implementing the corrective action and follow-up to ensure there is a positive change in behavior. Be timely in your follow-ups so that there is no lapse in time between the next situation of unacceptable behavior and the next level of corrective action. Also, immediately motivate and reinforce positive behavior changes.

Remember, if you show you are quick to take action for unacceptable behavior, this sends a message to your team members that you respect them as employees, individuals, and team members; and they will be far more motivated because of your actions. Apply the above five employee motivational secrets and eliminate the "Don Imus" personalities from your team, and you will create a motivated workplace that achieves team and organizational goals.

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