

**THE SUNDAY TIMES**

**Feb 15, 2009**

**YOUR PERSONAL ADVISER: CAREER**

## **Keeping morale up after wage cut**



**Q** I run a small firm of 15 people. Given the current economic climate, we've had to implement a wage cut. As you can imagine, employee morale has suffered as a result.

Can you recommend non-monetary ways that might help me motivate and retain my staff?

**A** A small company does have its benefits. For instance, as a strategy to retain staff, you can start by building a strong, healthy corporate culture anchored by good values.

Create a personable and open environment. A flatter organisational structure means that employees tend to be closer to the boss.

It is thus easier for the 'voice' of the employees to be heard by the top management. The boss should be open to employees' opinions and suggestions. Also, make it a point to openly compliment your staff on a job well done.

The boss should work on building stronger bonds with employees, even to the point of getting to know their family members. I have personally encountered candidates who find it hard to quit even for more money, due to the good working relationship they have with their bosses.

Encourage a politics-free environment. As a small company, office politics are more manageable. Make it a point to commend employees for exhibiting teamwork and the spirit of sharing to inculcate an environment that is free from office politics.

Promote career development. Career development and personal growth through strong mentorship can be an important retention strategy.

If you do not have the budget at this point in time, let your employees know that such opportunities for enrichment courses will be available when the good times come back again. If appropriate, you can also make provisions for job rotation, as this will help employees grow in other areas beyond their immediate scope.

**Kathleen Chew**  
**Assistant Vice-President**  
**JCG Search International**

**Advice provided in this column is not meant as a substitute for comprehensive professional advice.**