



**GOVERNING GOVERNORS' GUIDANCE
FOR GOVERNING GOVERNORS
ON BOOSTING STAFF MORALE
AND JOB SATISFACTION**

INTRODUCTION

Forty-one Governing Governors, and their colleagues from private sector prisons and IRCs, took part in a two-day symposium convened by the Butler Trust in December 2022.

Among the issues they considered was what can be done locally to boost staff morale and job satisfaction – both as an end in itself, and to help reduce levels of staff attrition and sickness.

Delegates examined nine factors affecting staff morale and job satisfaction in any workplace:

- The “office” (in this case the establishment)
- Relationships with colleagues, and fun
- Relationships with “customers” (in this case residents)
- Relationships with management
- Staff guidance and supervision
- Career development
- Work-life balance
- Support of families
- Staff pride

Although they also have a strong influence on staff morale and job satisfaction, the symposium did not consider pay and pensions, or the issue of staff safety – as the former is outside their control, and the latter is already a major focus, and the subject of on-going initiatives, at both local and national level.

FINDINGS

The “office” (establishment)

Working conditions

Conditions in an establishment can impact staff as much as residents.

Plants and greenery, both inside and out, can have a major impact on wellbeing. Brixton and Stafford were mentioned as examples of what can be achieved in smaller establishments with limited space; Hull and Woodhill of what can be done with more space.

The physical fabric of an establishment also has a significant effect on morale. Many struggle to get repairs and minor works done. Some have supervised work parties to help with this, often linked to education and training. Leeds’ Q Branch, and Ranby’s Project Party, were highlighted.

Artwork on the walls, improved lighting, and refurbishing fogged windows (to bring in sunlight and allow views outside), make a difference too. Full Sutton was mentioned as an example here.

As well as being unsightly, rubbish can give the impression to staff (as well as residents) of an establishment out of control. In addition to work parties responsible for cleaning up common areas, regular inspections by management, inter-wing and workplace cleanliness competitions, and bins both in cells and strategically placed around the establishment, can all be of benefit.

Loud music and shouting out of cells can create an intimidating feel (as well as keeping residents awake at night). Some establishments have zero tolerance to noise policies to help combat this.

Staff facilities

Staff messes can be a popular facility, especially those offering hot food and drink, including at breakfast and on weekends. Costs can be kept low by employing residents to serve and prepare the food; linking with education can help offset costs too. Nottingham's staff bistro (open 7 days, from breakfast time) was highlighted as an especially popular example; while Full Sutton were developing a barista bar (open to both staff and residents).

Staff rooms and refurbished wing offices, where staff can get away from the landings, with comfortable furnishings and food preparation facilities are another plus. Liverpool and Bullingdon, among others, were mentioned here. Staff gardens, such as at Thorn Cross, Lewes, and Woodhill, are also valued.

Offering access to the gym and classes run by PEIs, including at lunchtime, evenings, and weekends, are popular too; and some establishments allow staff to bring family members.

Other ideas included:

- water coolers for staff;
- staff allotments on the grounds (like at Aylesbury);
- opening evening classes and clubs to staff (chess clubs, guitar lessons, etc);
- opening residents' cooking facilities to staff;
- allowing staff to bring their dogs to work, and providing a dog walking service by residents;
- creche facilities for staff with very young children;
- a sterile area where staff can make calls without needing to leave the establishment;
- subsidised parking if no free parking is available (may require additional funding);
- asking staff what other facilities they might value.

Bedford have launched a staff lottery to raise money for charity and to help improve outcomes for staff, including improvements to staff facilities.

Relationships with colleagues, and fun

While traditionally strong, bonds between staff have been affected by high turnover and a large influx of new staff, with many staff not even knowing each others' names. Injecting some fun into the workplace can also be an important boost for staff morale.

Ideas on this included:

- charity fundraising events;
- sporting events, bingo & quizzes – and competitions between groups/across establishments;
- staff social evenings and other events (Christmas lunch, summer barbeque);
- organised walks and cycle rides;
- themed days for staff throughout the year;
- team building “away days”;
- Christmas jumper days;
- llama walking(!);
- including team building and “fun” in the annual #HiddenHeroes Day celebrations;
- setting up a staff social committee (like at Lincoln) to help organise activities.

As with staff facilities, a staff lottery (like at Bedford) could help with funding.

Relationships with “customers” (residents)

The nature of relationships between staff and residents matters too. Joint events and activities can help, with suggestions including:

- joint sports days and events;
- staff-resident choirs and bands;
- staff-resident lunches and dinners;
- opening evening classes and clubs to staff (see also under “staff facilities”);
- setting up a joint committee to look at other ways of improving relations.

Other ideas focused on improving relations through engaging with families, including:

- encouraging more contact between residents’ families and staff on visits;
- holding consultation meetings with families;
- inviting families to join in “celebration of success” events with their loved ones.

Relationships with management

Previous Butler Trust symposiums for officers found staff want three things from their managers:

- to be cared about and valued;
- to be recognised for good work;
- to be listened to and kept informed.

Showing staff they are cared about and valued

Recommendations for showing staff they are cared about and valued, included:

- Governing Governors contacting anyone assaulted at work, and visiting anyone hospitalised;
- sending flowers and cards on the death of a loved one;
- sending personalised birthday cards to staff, and possibly Christmas cards too.

Governing Governors need to be “visible” to staff, but many found it hard to find the time. Suggestions on improving visibility included:

- blocking out a set time each week to go “out and about”;
- drawing up a schedule to ensure they visit each area once a month (for example), if they were unable to do so more often;
- placing themselves in areas, such as in the gate/centre, where they can be seen by, and speak to, many staff at once.

Wellbeing support is important too. In addition to regular wellbeing days and existing support such as Care Teams, TRIM teams, mental health allies and PAM Assist, ideas on this included:

- extending the use of animal therapy to staff as well as residents [at Buckley Hall, staff can take therapy dogs for a walk at lunchtime];
- giving staff and residents the chance to talk and reflect following a death in custody [such as Littlehey’s “Time to Talk” initiative];
- a dedicated space for staff support, outside the establishment if possible [like the space used jointly by the Care Team and Trim Team at Lewes];
- guidance for staff on the range of support services available to them [such as Hewell’s “Staff Support Guide”].

Recognising good work

Formal staff recognition schemes, for both teams and individuals, are widely appreciated by staff.

Ideas for prizes included: certificates, gift vouchers, biscuits/chocolates, an extra day's leave, and designated parking near the gate for a month. Involving peers, and possibly residents too, in the nomination and judging process can add to their perceived value. [Some staff prefer to be recognised in private rather than in front of their peers.]

Other ideas for recognising good work included:

- encouraging first line managers to regularly thank their staff members and praise their work;
- personal thank you letters from the Governor for a job well done;
- using a staff newsletter and full staff briefings to thank staff, both individually and collectively;
- league tables for staff "finds"
(Buckley Hall have a "Beat [as in outperform, not hit!] the Dog" competition).

Listening to staff and keeping them informed

Staff want to feel their ideas and concerns are listened to and heard, and that they are kept up-to-date on what is going on and plans for the future. Suggestions on this included:

- a regular staff newsletter (in hardcopy for those who have limited access to the intranet);
- regular full staff briefings;
- regular team-level meetings (to consult as well as inform);
- breakfast / lunch / tea with the Governor;
- a staff forum (mirroring resident councils);
- "ask the Governor" and "staff suggestion" box, with responses published in the newsletter.

Staff guidance and supervision

Working in prisons can be challenging and daunting, especially for new staff.

Suggestions for supporting staff in their roles included:

- SOs on the wings to support and supervise staff in their work;
- regular group reflective-practice sessions with managers, along the lines of "group supervision" offered to psychologists and segregation staff;
- mentors and individual supervision sessions for new staff;
- written guidance for staff on their roles, such as the Prison Officer pocket guides issued to staff at Woodhill, and Wymott's OSG guides.

Training and guidance for managers and supervisors on supporting and supervising staff would also help (although this may require central funding and co-ordination).

Career development

While career development is largely out of the direct control of Governing Governors, some steps which could be taken locally, included:

- providing opportunities locally for staff to gain experience in different settings (including for those who are not interested in promotion);
- helping staff members to prepare for promotion assessments / boards.

Work-life balance

While opportunities to work from home are limited for staff, especially for those in a front-line role, there are ways of helping to improve work-life balance, including:

- four-day shift patterns for uniformed staff (as in some establishments already);
- allowing greater flexibility on rostering for those caring for young children and others;
- considering (re-)introducing team-based self-rostering;
- allowing people to work part-time (may need HQ approval);
- allowing staff to bring their dogs to work, and a dog walking service provided by residents;
- creche facilities for staff with very young children (as noted under staff facilities);
- offering working-from-home opportunities for those whose roles allow.

Support of families

Family members can have a significant impact on staff morale, either positively (if they are proud and supportive of their role), or negatively (especially if they are anxious for their loved ones' safety). Their impact can be particularly significant on new staff.

While improving work-life balance for staff (as outlined above) should help, other suggestions for increasing family support and assuaging any anxieties included:

- staff-family open days;
- inviting families of new staff to tour the establishment, and attend staff "graduation" events;
- inviting family members to attend staff recognition events;
- involving families in social events (e.g. staff barbeque);
- allowing family members to use the gym and take part in Parkruns;
- a newsletter for staff families – including competitions for their children – sent to their homes;
- encouraging children to send in pictures of their #HiddenHero parents;
- a forum for staff families (similar to the resident family forums in many establishments).

Staff pride

The pride staff feel in their establishment and their work can also have a major impact on morale.

Some of the suggestions already noted (including on team building, staff recognition and families) can help in building staff pride. Other ideas included:

- local "graduation" events for new staff;
 - long service pin badges (for 5, 10, 15 and 20+ years' service);
 - building the establishment's "brand" (including a local logo, motto, and pin badge);
 - an annual staff photo (displayed in the gate);
 - inviting former resident "success stories" to address staff to show the impact they can have;
 - inviting local dignitaries/celebrities to visit, and address staff to thank them for their service (such as the local High Sheriff, who changes every 12 months);
 - using #HiddenHeroes Day to celebrate staff and the work they all do.
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