

## CCCO HR SWAP MEET

### TOP 10 TIPS: Moneyless Staff Motivating

Brett Hendrie, Managing Director,  
Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival

- 1) *Provide staff with clear goals and timelines for responsibilities.*** Everyone benefits when tasks and processes are clear: employees have a framework for expectations, and managers know what they should be receiving/seeing. It can be helpful to give direction about a preferred approach to a task, and specific things they should avoid doing. At Hot Docs, staff work on 'critical path' with their supervisor for all levels of tasks and deadlines, reviewed before a season begins.
- 2) *Recognize that the quality of supervision is reflected in the performance of the employee.*** The more direction, help and active management provided to staff can help ensure problems are avoided and the best results come from work. At Hot Docs, mostly an annual event, we don't benefit much from addressing problems on 'scheduled review' basis. We try to give active feedback, to guide staff, and prevent bad surprises.
- 3) *Ensure staff know that feedback mechanisms exist for them to suggest ideas and contribute to the organizations' plans.*** No one wants to be a cog in a machine, and great ideas come from unexpected places. Formal or informal 'doors open' policies generate results, and keep staff thinking about next great idea and big picture. At Hot Docs, annual reports by all staff are required: what employee did and how they did it; but also to provide ideas for improvements. We develop atmosphere where ideas are brought up for consideration at regular meetings, or sent around via email.
- 4) *Staff benefit when they feel that they receive fair treatment, support and that work-load or work-place issues can be talked about.*** Transparency and equality benchmarks to strive for, especially with benefits, salary, evaluation, etc. Hot Docs tries to ensure consistency across employees of equal standing/seniority. With so many stakeholders (public, industry, sponsors, media, etc.), staff must know their 'voice' has commensurate weight. Encourage staff to speak with management if they feel issues/obstacles have made goals, timelines or environment untenable. Try to gently ask "Do you need help?", when it is in everyone's best interests (and if staff might feel uncomfortable doing so).
- 5) *Contextualize small tasks and details by associating them with a 'big picture' concept, and encourage information sharing.*** Superior employees are informed and educated employees. Easier to intelligently plan your own areas (and forecast potential conflicts) if you understand what is happening in other departments and on desk beside you. Hot Docs has twice-a-week 'Status Meetings' for management to discuss major initiatives, goals, and current issues (regular agenda cut s back on number of issue specific meetings required between same management team members). We also have once-a-week 'All Staff' meetings that are informal, but chaired by a senior manager. Staff encouraged to explain tasks and events occurring that week, so all learn about colleagues' responsibilities and current focus. We keep the tone fun and lively, "team" focused, and avoid pre-planned agendas.

- 6) Provide staff with ownership of their responsibilities.** Different employees with varying levels of experience and differing skill sets will, of course, require varying levels of supervision and direction. A good manager should be able to judge what levels of supervision works best, but, micro-managing can be a terrible working relationship for the employee. Allowing staff members to 'run with things', and empowering them officially to make judgment calls (without fear of ramification) can keep them motivated. At Hot Docs, some of the most successful employees have been those who have been free to reinterpret 'standard' ways of addressing tasks and goals. This allows them to meet goals in a way that makes sense to them, and often creates a sense of personal pride in their daily work.
- 7) Help get staff invested in the event by helping to provide access to their friends and families.** People will naturally seek to excel when they feel their work is something that can be enjoyed and respected by their friends and families. At Hot Docs, we guarantee that all staff (no matter level) is provided with passes and tickets to the festival they can distribute as they see fit. This has added benefit of being great word-of-mouth outreach and promotion for the festival, and helps to develop a 'core', dedicated audience.
- 8) Provide staff with adequate tools and resources for their task, and where limitations exist, recognize these.** Reasonable goals and timelines must also be attached to the proper equipment, information and manpower to reach the desired outcome. Even the most innovative employee cannot compensate for considerations that are beyond their control. At Hot Docs, as a non-profit arts organization, we try to actively recognize that we're working with limited resources to achieve (sometimes and virtually) limitless goals (eg: 'more audience members', 'more volunteers', 'more fundraising', etc.). Our team should have at their disposal to do what's required, but when they don't, we try to consider "the best we can do" as something better than a compromised result.
- 9) Actively provide encouragement and recognition for all employees, and showcase exceptional performance.** Direct and to-the-point motivational feedback, even for de rigeur tasks, can be an important way to keep a team encouraged through the most stressful and busy periods. At Hot Docs, we try to ensure that all staff are provided with recognition for their efforts through All Staff meetings, organization email distribution, and also by name recognition in our published materials (eg: programme book, website, etc.). As well, supervisors try to give positive feedback in an honest and context-driven (eg: "This is great because...") way.
- 10) Provide valuable (and valued) professional development opportunities.** Many large organizations invest in professional development programs, courses and tools. For groups with less at their disposal, smaller and cost-effective ways can help staff expand professional horizons. Hot Docs tries to incorporate 'extra' staff members into meetings outside their immediate domain. This can mean bringing a junior employee to meeting with an important external stakeholder (so they can both make a connection, and learn how these meetings operate). Also, we learn from seeing how other festivals operate: we try to provide full-time staff with opportunities to travel to other cities to see first-hand what's happening.