

Realistic Motivation

Companies appear to be willing to go to any lengths to motivate employees. A recent article in the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, carried an article about the Accident Fund Co.'s efforts in this regard. Their CEO drove into a recent annual meeting on his Harley Davidson motorcycle.

How preposterous! If the tables were turned and an employee tried the same caper, what he or she could expect would be instant termination. But how could someone who had risen to the status of CEO come up with such a misguided and irrelevant idea as this one? Whether annual meetings need to be more entertaining, as someone at the company thought, is hardly the issue. Annual meetings, especially post Enron, ought to be filled with facts and numbers, - ideally positive and certainly honest ones. Employees don't usually attend annual meetings in large numbers in any case. Shareholder would be even less likely to be impressed. How the consultant, who promoted this bit of theatre could think that such an action would make employees feel valued defies any rule of logic. What would work in motivating employees? Here are a few suggestions:

- Have company goals worth supporting in the first place.
- Assume that employees are adults who find value in making the company improve through their own efforts and creativity, instead of thinking of them as children who are easy to con and amuse
- Send in fewer theatre troupes, celebrity impersonators and comedians; handle the work to be done creatively by letting employees come up with better ideas and give them authority and time to implement them.
- Take ideas seriously. Employees are on the front line and can offer positive ways to improve the company
- Respect their needs for work-life balance; working nine to five for five days a week with regular holidays has a very positive effect on work stress.
- Help people understand themselves and others by offering them the right tools at the appropriate time.
- Earn employees' trust by being worthy of it.