



Roundtable Mentor,
Jaspreet Sandhu,
Director of Loyalty and
Engagement at the
Toronto International Film
Festival (TIFF), shared
her perspective on how
to keep a team motivated
following lay-offs and cost
cutting.

Mentoring **MATTERS**



My company has just gone through some cost cutting, which included laying off a number of people. How do I keep my team motivated now that we have fewer people but the same targets to hit?

It's difficult when a company is in cost cutting mode, and even more difficult when your colleagues are being let go. It triggers feelings of fear, and it brings up an uncertainty that we are not as secure in the roles as we would like.

As leaders we're not only expected to weather through these changes, but also to serve as a guiding light for our teams. While that's not easy, here are some tips that may be helpful.

To start, I think it's important that you take a moment to get your own bearings on what's happened and where your motivation will come from. Reflect on what impact the changes have had, and will have in the future – for you, for your team and for the organization.

Take stock of the known and unknowns. Your emotions and thought-process are probably not too far off from your team's. What is your trust level in the company? What does the future of the company look like? Have the stakes on performance increased? Is there a future for your team – can the team grow and careers progress? What is your role in the company's future?

Without a moment to reflect, and connect with a place of your own authentic motivation, you run the risk of being disingenuous in your approach.

It's important to draw on your own positivity, in order to motivate your team. I have seen leaders who don't cope well with the changes and quickly fuel pessimism with comments that the company goals are unattainable or that lack of resourcing is a barrier to completing work. They are unable to take the helm of what is within their control and become defeated by the unknowns. As leaders, we need to take nebulous situations and make them real and concrete for our teams.

So, turning to your team, what can you do to motivate them through these times of fear and uncertainty? My approach has always been through four key strategies:

1. Situating the team in the truth and being clear about what I know
2. Staying focused on looking forward, rather than sinking into despair or paranoia
3. Emphasising my commitment to team growth
4. Ensuring there are support structures in place

The truth helps re-calibrate and dispel thoughts that the team may be having (but not sharing).

Having honest conversations can help alleviate fears. It's the water-cooler chatter that you want to be able to tap into and dispel. There may be things you don't know - and that's okay - and it's okay to share that. Essentially, you want to remind everyone that you're in the same boat, and that you want to row in the same direction. When I am honest with employees, and give them context or paint a situational picture of what's going on, it helps them digest 'what's really going on'.

Focusing on the future allows the team to have a sense of direction, purpose, and motivation toward something positive.

While the future may be altered with the changes, consider what project or key milestone is coming up (and can be celebrated). Also, consider past priorities, and what projects may need to be reprioritized or may no longer be important. Re-prioritization offers you a chance to highlight what's important, and keep the next chapter positive. Think about how you will frame things to the team so that they can see future goals clearly and with positivity, whether they are the same or adjusted.

Just as you set future facing goals to address company needs, future facing goals need to be set for each team member.

With fewer resources now, it's time to re-assess skill sets and determine where there may be skills that need to be honed. Establishing a plan to do this reinforces your commitment to investing in the team and their personal growth. It also demonstrates that you value them. There are plenty of training options for no or little costs, recognizing budget cuts. And, there is also a great opportunity in having team members share their learning/development with one another.

Sharing learning across the team can lay inroads to creating a strong support structure.

That said, in considering support, it is not just about the workload, but also about creating a culture of open, transparent discussions. Each team member may respond differently to the uncertainty that comes with cuts to budget and staff, and you'll want to be able to address these with empathy. This is a moment to show your values, to create channels of communication, to be responsive, and to do and say the things that you would like to hear and see for yourself.



Jaspreet Sandhu is the Director of Loyalty and Engagement at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) leading grassroots fundraising, process design and administration at the world's largest public film festival. Jaspreet has led TIFF's loyalty programme to its highest household counts, grown retention, and tripled results in annual giving campaigns. Over the course of her career at TIFF she has raised and stewarded a cumulative \$20M.

Giving back to the community is a high priority for Jaspreet, as demonstrated by her strong volunteer presence such as: the Customer Experience Council for the Canadian Marketing Association, Civic Action's Emerging Leaders Network, Reel Asian's Marketing Committee. Jaspreet has been published for her artistic and academic works and holds an MA in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory from the Faculty of Humanities, as well as BFA, BA in Film Production and South Asian Studies.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.