

# Protect a Short-Staffed Team from Burnout

If your business is like many, you may be facing an overload of work without the workers to complete it. Hiring is the obvious solution, but, as noted in this issue's cover story, it's not the easiest one. Short-term layoffs, employee illnesses or quarantines, or even lags in training new hires can contribute to an overworked, fatigued team—which can lead to accidents. Protect your employees and your business from burnout with a few of these ideas.

**Get organized.** When you're short-staffed, not everything will happen on time, every time. So, set priorities. Differentiate between must-achieve goals and those tasks that aren't vital. Keep in mind that while this distinction might be obvious to you, your staff may not see it as clearly. So, spell it out, and revisit often as things change.

**Be realistic.** Those must-achieve goals have to be grounded in reality. Set reasonable expectations up front, with your own team and with

customers. This gives everyone a bit of breathing room, but still establishes accountability for the most important goals.

WHEN YOU'RE SHORT-STAFFED, NOT EVERYTHING WILL HAPPEN ON TIME, EVERY TIME. SO, SET PRIORITIES.

**Listen.** You might be the expert in your business, but chances are that your employees are better tuned-in to how their particular roles work. If you're trying to ramp up efficiency, they could be your best source of ideas.

**Focus on teamwork.** The goal of listening, of course, is collaboration. Foster an environment where ideas are heard and implemented. Your

employees will feel more engaged and will be more likely to work together, putting in extra effort when it's needed.

**Encourage breaks.** We all know that no one performs at their best when they are fatigued. It's tempting, however, to push that fact aside when stress levels rise. Don't give in. Insist that your employees take ample time to recharge before they get back on the job. Reevaluate your policies for time off, meals and shorter breaks.

**Lead by example.** Have you seen *Remember the Titans*? There's a pivotal scene in that movie where one character says to another "Attitude reflects leadership." If you're in charge, morale and productivity start with you.

**Express thanks.** You probably know in your own life that a little appreciation can change your whole outlook. Say thank you to your team often and in tangible ways. ■

