

## CASE STUDY 7.1

### Building Motivation

Construction Products Inc. sells construction products to various retail and wholesale markets across the United States. Its only office is in Illinois, and so it sends sales representatives on the road to different territories to obtain orders and develop relationships with retailers. You are the newest sales representative and have been assigned to the Southeast territory. A typical work day for a sales rep involves stopping at numerous stores and talking with general managers while visiting retail stores. On these visits, sales reps push for wholesale orders and fill out market reports. Most territories are responsible for about 50 retail stores and a dozen wholesale accounts. Sales reps are expected to spend a lot of time in the stores, focusing on optimizing product location within the store, training employees, and educating customers. For example, a sales rep typically tries to get larger space in the store for plywood so that more can be sold. Employees and customers need to be educated on the different grades of plywood and how to match them with building projects.

After 6 months on the job, your boss has tasked you with increasing sales in your territory by 20%. You begin by explaining the benefits of your product and why it should be the product of choice. During store visits, you socialize with store employees but realize quickly that getting everyone on the same page is not going to be as easy as anticipated. The employees don't really care if the customer gets the best material for their project. They get their paycheck regardless. Among the 50 retail stores that you are assigned to, there are 7 that agree to help you.

The next month you try a different approach in your other 43 stores. In those stores, you spend time teaching employees about various building products so they can educate their customers. They seem to grasp an understanding of the benefits your product could bring to the customers compared to competitors' products, and they understand the applications. But when you ask them to teach customers what you had shown them, you were met with looks of confusion and aggravation. Although a bit reluctant, they agreed to give it a try.

Checking the weekly sales figures over the next month, you notice that there had been little improvement in the sales of your product at these stores. Next, you follow your boss' advice and speak with the manager of one of the retail stores. You show him a printout of the sales numbers and how much income your products bring to the store as well as ask for his help getting employees on board with promoting the products. Since the store manager's main concern is revenue for the store, he quickly agreed and offered his full support.

The store manager called a meeting where he, the store employees, and you discussed techniques for presentation and how employees could effectively pitch the product to customers. You left feeling confident that the employees would be effective. However, on the next review not only had there been no improvement in sales but the employees attitudes toward you had drastically declined. They either avoided you or were unfriendly.

You realize you must come up with a completely different plan of attack to be successful and spend the next Monday morning considering your courses of action.

### Discussion Questions

1. Relate the motivation techniques described in the case to those covered in this chapter. What have you tried already? What do you think should still be tried?
2. How is it different trying to motivate people who work directly for you compared to those who work for someone else (as in the situation with the store employees in the case)?
3. Explain the role that leadership plays in motivating these retail employees.
4. As a follow-up to this case, the sales representative started offering financial incentives (bonuses) to employees that met the desired sales increase. Discuss the pros and cons of using incentives.