

Motivation & Leadership

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success. - Explorer Ernest Shackleton in a 1890 job ad for the first Antarctic expedition.

A person's motivation is a combination of desire and energy directed at achieving a goal. Influencing someone's motivation means getting them to want to do what you know must be done. A person's motivation depends upon two things:

- The strength of certain needs. For example, you are hungry, but you must have a task completed by a nearing deadline. If you are starving you will eat. If you are slightly hungry you will finish the task at hand.
- The perception that taking a certain action will help satisfy those needs. For example, you have two burning needs - the desire to complete the task and the desire to go to lunch. Your perception of how you view those two needs will determine which one takes priority. If you believe that you could be fired for not completing the task, you will probably put off lunch and complete the task. If you believe that you will not get into trouble or perhaps finish the task in time, then you will likely go to lunch.

People can be motivated by such forces as beliefs, values, interests, fear, and worthy causes. Some of these forces are internal, such as needs, interests, and beliefs. Others are external, such as danger, the environment, or pressure from a loved one. There is no simple formula for motivation -- you must keep an open viewpoint on human nature. There is a complex array of forces steering the direction of each person and these forces cannot always be seen or studied. In addition, if the same forces are steering two different people, each one may act differently. Knowing that each person may react to different needs will guide your decisions and actions in certain situations.

As a leader you have the power to influence motivation. The following guidelines form a basic view of motivation. They will help guide your decision making process:

Allow the needs of your team to coincide with the needs of your organization. Nearly everyone is influenced by the needs for job security, promotion, raises, and approval of their peers and/or leaders. They are also influenced by internal forces such as values, morals, and ethics. Likewise, the organization needs good people in a wide variety of jobs. Ensure that your team is trained, encouraged, and has opportunities to advance. Also, ensure that the way you conduct business has the same values, moral, and ethic principles that you seek in others. If you conduct business in a dishonest manner, your team will be dishonest to you, for that will be the kind of people that you will attract.

Reward good behavior. Although a certificate, letter, or a thank you may seem small and insignificant, they can be powerful motivators. The reward should be specific and prompt. Do not say something general, such as "for doing a good job," rather cite the specific action that made you believe it was indeed a good job. In addition, help those who are good. We all make mistakes or need help on an occasion to achieve a particular goal.

Set the example. You must be the role model that you want others to grow into.

Develop morale and esprit de corps. Morale is the mental, emotional, and spiritual state of a person. Almost everything you do will have an impact on your organization. You should always be aware how your actions and decisions might affect it. Esprit de corps means team spirit - it is defined as the spirit of the organization or collective body (in French it literally means "spirit of the body"). It is the consciousness of the organization that allows the people within it to identify with and feel a part of. Is your workplace a place where people cannot wait to get away from; or is it a place that people enjoy spending a part of their lives?

Allow your team to be part of the planning and problem solving process. This helps with their development and allows you to coach them. Secondly, it motivates them -- people who are part of the decision making process become the owners of it, thus it gives them a personal interest in seeing the plan succeed. Thirdly, communication is clearer as everyone has a better understanding of what role they must play as part of the team. Next, it creates an open trusting communication bond. They are no longer just the doers for the organization -- they are now part of it! Finally, recognition and appreciation from a respected leader are powerful motivators.

Look out for your team. Although you do not have control over their personal lives, you must show concern for them. Things that seem of no importance to you might be extremely critical to them. You must be able to empathize with them. This is from the German word, *einfuhling*, which means "to feel with", or the ability to perceive another person's view of the world as though that view were your own. The Sioux Indian Tribal Prayer reads, "Great Spirit, help us never to judge another until we have walked for two weeks in his moccasins." Also note that empathy differs from sympathy in that sympathy connotes spontaneous emotion rather than a conscious, reasoned response. Sympathizing with others may be less useful to another person if we are limited by the strong feelings of the moment.

Keep them informed. Keeping the communication channel open allows a person to have a sense of control over their lives.

Make their jobs challenging, exciting, and meaningful. Make each feel like an individual in a great team...rather than a cog in a lifeless machine. People need meaningful work, even if it is tiring and unpleasant; they need to know that it is important and necessary for the survival of the organization.

Counsel people who behave in a way that is counter to the company's goals. All the guidelines before this took the positive approach. But, sometimes this does not always work. You must let people know when they are not performing to an acceptable standard. By the same token, you must protect them when needed. For example, if someone in your department is always late arriving for work and it is causing disruptions, then you must take action. On the other hand, if you have an extremely good department and once in a while they are a few minutes late, then do the right thing...protect them from the bureaucracy!

Lack Of Motivation

Although many jobs have problems that are inherent to the position, it is the problems that are inherent to the person that cause us to lose focus from our main task of getting results. These motivational problems could arrive from family pressures, personality conflicts, a lack of understanding how the behavior affects other people or process, etc.

When something breaks the psychological contract between the employee and the organization, the leader must find out what the exact problem is by looking beyond the symptoms, find a solution, focus on the problem, and implement a plan of action. One of the worst situations that a leader can get into is to get all the facts wrong.

Start by collecting and documenting what the employee is not doing or should be doing - tasks, special projects, reports, etc. Try to observe the employee performing the task. Also, do not make it a witch hunt, observe and record what the employee is not doing to standards. Check past performance appraisals, previous managers, or other leaders the employee might have worked with. Try to find out if it is a pattern or something new.

Once you know the problem, then work with the employee to solve it. Most employees want to do a good job. It is in your best interest to work with the employee as long as the business needs are met and it is within the bonds of the organization to do so.

Causes of problems

Expectations or requirements have not been adequately communicated

This motivational issue is not the fault of the employee. By providing feedback and ensuring the feedback is consistent, you provide the means for employees to motivate themselves to the desired behavior. For example, inconsistent feedback would be for management to say it wants good safety practices, then frowns on workers who slow down by complying with regulations. Or expressing that careful workmanship is needed, but reinforces only volume of production.

Feedback must be provided on a continuous basis. If you only provide it during an employee's performance rating period, then you are NOT doing your job.

Also, ensure that there is not a difference in priorities. Employees with several tasks and projects on their plates must be clearly communicated as to what comes first when pressed for time. With the ever increasing notion to do more with less, we must understand that not everything can get done at once. Employees often choose the task that they enjoy the most, rather than the task they dislike the most. And all too often that disliked task is what needs to get performed first.

Lack of motivation

A lack of motivation could be caused by a number of problems, to include personal, family, financial, etc. Help employees to recognize and understand the negative consequences of their behavior. This may require several types of counseling methods.

Shift in focus

Today, its a lucky employee (or unlucky if that employee thrives on change) that does not have her job restructured. Changing forces in the market forces changes in organizations. When this happens, ensure that every employee knows:

- How has the job changed and what are the new responsibilities?
- Why the job was restructured. Is it part of a longer overhaul?
- How will their performance be evaluated and by whom?
- Do they need to learn new skills?
- Can the old responsibilities be delegated?
- How will their career benefit from this transition?
- What new skills or training do they need to perform successfully?
- Will this make them more marketable in the future?

By keeping them informed, you help to eliminate some of the fear and keep them focused on what must be performed.

Reference

Military Leadership (1993). *FM 22-100* San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman.