



Motivate without Overmanaging

Many business leaders have lost sight of what motivates people at work. In fact, some companies haven't updated their incentive practices in years, which means they're probably struggling to create and sustain high-performing teams.

Companies continue to ignore the obvious: Offering incentives and rewards is less effective than tapping into truly meaningful intrinsic motivation. Leaders operate on old assumptions about motivation despite a wealth of well-documented scientific evidence.

The old "carrot-and-stick" mentality actually inhibits employees from seeking creative solutions, partly because they focus on attaining rewards instead of solving problems. Review the most notorious business failures, and you'll find that company leaders focused on rewarding short-term results at the expense of sustaining success.

Effective motivation requires you to offer opportunities that satisfy three basic human needs:

1. **Autonomy**
2. **Relatedness**
3. **Competence**

This approach is far from new. Social scientists have grasped what motivates people for more than 60 years. But managers continue to use the carrot/stick model with incentive programs. Regardless of gender, race, culture or generation, the reality is clear: Are you satisfying your people's psychological needs?

I'm reading *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work...and What Does: The New Science of Leading, Energizing, and Engaging* by consultant Susan Fowler. The book serves as a good reminder that managers must periodically review their motivational techniques to recapture their leadership mojo.

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?



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The Motivational Trifecta

1. Autonomy

“Autonomy is our human need to perceive we have choices. It is our need to feel that what we are doing is of our own volition. It is our perception that we are the source of our actions.” ~ Fowler

As adults, we never lose our need for autonomy. Productivity significantly increases for blue-collar workers in manufacturing plants when they are given the ability to stop the line. So does the productivity of white-collar workers in major investment banks who report a high sense of autonomy.

But when managers become too involved in coaching, encouraging and pushing people to be productive, they can actually undermine perceived autonomy. It's a fine line that requires Goldilocks management: just the right amount.

2. Relatedness

Relatedness is defined as our need to care about, and be cared for by, others. “It is our need to feel connected to others without concerns about ulterior motives,” Fowler notes. “It is our need to feel that we are contributing to something greater than ourselves.”

In 1924, Western Electric conducted one of the first studies on workplace behaviors at Hawthorne Works, a plant located just outside of Chicago. Researchers found that workers were more productive when they knew they were being observed and were included in social interactions. George Elton Mayo described this as a positive emotional effect stemming from workers' awareness of a sympathetic, interested observer.

We are social animals. When offered opportunities to work together, as in teams, our engagement and productivity increase. We thrive on connection. Think about it: We spend an enormous percentage of our time at work, getting ready for work, preparing for meetings and presentations, and thinking about what we're going to say or do. Some experts estimate we spend 75 percent of our waking hours focused on work. If our relationship needs go unmet at work, we're unlikely to compensate outside the workplace.

Leaders have enormous opportunities to help their people find meaning in workplace interpersonal experiences. If you make the mistake of applying pressure to perform without regarding how people feel, they'll likely interpret your actions as self-serving. This never works. Your staff will instead disconnect and disengage.

3. Competence: Lessons from Monkeys

“Competence is our need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities. It is demonstrating skill over time. It is feeling a sense of growth and flourishing.” ~ Fowler

In 1949, psychologist Harry Harlow placed puzzles in monkeys' cages and was surprised to find that the primates successfully solved them. Harlow saw no logical reason for them to do so. So, what motivated them? The answer is threefold:

- The monkeys' survival didn't depend on solving the puzzles.
- They didn't receive any rewards, nor avoid any punishments, for their work.
- They solved the puzzles because they had a desire to do so.

As to their motivation, Harlow offered a novel theory: “The performance of the task provided intrinsic reward.” That is, the monkeys performed because they found it gratifying to solve puzzles. They enjoyed it, and the joy of the task served as its own reward.

Further experiments found that offering external rewards to solve these puzzles didn't improve performance. In fact, rewards disrupted task completion. This led Harlow to identify a third motivational drive:

1. The first drive for behaviors is survival. We drink, eat and copulate to ensure our survival.
2. The second drive is to seek rewards and avoid punishment.
3. The third drive is intrinsic: to achieve internal satisfaction.

What Motivates People?

Twenty years passed before psychologist Edward Deci, now a professor at the University of Rochester, followed up on Harlow's studies.

In 1969, he ran a series of experiments that showed students lost intrinsic interest in an activity when money was offered as an external reward. These results surprised many behavioral scientists. Although rewards can deliver a short-term boost, the effect wears off. Even worse, rewards can reduce a person's longer-term motivation to continue a project.

Deci and Richard Ryan later expanded on the earlier studies. Their Self-Determination Theory proposed three main intrinsic needs involved in self-determination, each of which is universal, innate and psychological:

1. Competence
2. Autonomy
3. Psychological relatedness

Deci proposed that human beings have an inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise their capacities, to explore, and to learn. Unlike drives (for thirst, food and sex), these needs are never completely satisfied. Even after we attain degrees of competency, autonomy and relatedness, we still want more.

Trying to motivate people with the promise of rewards simply doesn't work. You cannot impose growth, learning and meaning upon people; they must find it for themselves. But you can promote a learning environment that doesn't undermine people's sense of competence.

Motivating without Micromanaging

Most managers want to motivate people to peak performance, but their approach often backfires. In their fervent desire to teach people what they know to be true (after all, it worked to get them promoted to management, right?), some managers enthusiastically over-manage.

Over-management can manifest as micromanagement. When you tell staffers what to do, how to do it, when to do it and why your way is better, you undermine their ability to think for themselves. Instead of enjoying some control over the way they work, they begin to feel powerless and controlled. They may even start to doubt their competency. Their relationship with you deteriorates, as it is now based on compliance and conformity.

Managers who micromanage destroy any chance for their people to find meaning and fulfillment at work. Your staff's basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competency remain unfulfilled, prompting them to withdraw and disengage.

The Domino Effect

Autonomy, relatedness and competency are interdependent. When you fail to offer opportunities for learning and growth (competency), you thwart opportunities for autonomy and relatedness.

Mess with one and the others fall like dominoes.

Don't make the mistake of believing your people lack motivation. People want to learn, grow, enjoy work, be productive and make a contribution. They want to enjoy relationships at work. It's human nature.

When our psychological needs are satisfied, we experience positive energy, vitality and a sense of well-being. We strive for more. You've likely experienced this with your hobbies. No one needs to tell you to engage in something you enjoy; you do it because you derive pleasure from it.

Motivational Conversations

Boost employee commitment by conducting a motivational outlook conversation. Ask your people to identify what motivates them to do their work. Your goal is to help them identify motivating factors that have maximum impact and create optimum energy.

Most people identify several reasons for working: from the external (money or status) to the internal (finding meaning, acting on one's values and ideals, aspiring to a higher purpose). Fowler adds the following:

1. **Inherence:** I enjoy doing this.
2. **Integration:** Work helps me fulfill my purpose as a leader.
3. **Alignment:** I value developing people.

She also cites negative motivational outlooks:

4. **Imposition:** I have to; it's my job.
5. **Externalization:** It's what I'm paid to do.
6. **Disinterest:** I'd rather be doing something else.

Start to regard motivation as a skill—one that can be learned, acquired, encouraged and sustained. Each of us can choose our motivation.

Motivational conversations help people discover different reasons for doing their work. Once they pinpoint their current motivations, they can work toward finding their internal motivations—ideally, those that relate to their values.

It may take several conversations for staffers to deliver their best work through values they truly care about. You can help them see the bigger picture and connect the dots to feeling valued.

Remember: People are already motivated. You can provide a culture that encourages higher levels. Don't succumb to organizational systems that favor driving over thriving. It doesn't have to be that way.

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