



Motivation: What the Greatest Leaders Do

In spite of all that's known about motivation, many leaders and managers continue to misunderstand it and fail to make good use of its true nature. We make assumptions about what drives people, and often times, fail to understand their true (and often hidden) needs.

Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain behavior, the reasons for people's actions, desires, and needs. Motivation is what causes a person to want to repeat a behavior—as when we form new habits.

According to American psychologist Abraham H. Maslow, people are motivated by unsatisfied needs. These include, from our most basic (lowest/earliest) to most complex (highest/latest):

- Physiology (hunger, thirst, sleep)
- Safety/Security/Shelter/Health
- Social/Love/Friendship
- Self-esteem/Recognition/Achievement
- Self-actualization/Achievement of full potential (can never be fully accomplished)

There are many perspectives on motivation theories, and working adults are familiar with rewards programs, bonuses, and organizational incentives designed to encourage performance. But external motivation works only for a limited time and not in all situations.

According to a September 2022 Gallup poll, at least 50% of the US workforce is “[quiet quitting](#),” doing the required minimum while “psychologically

A Message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that “*what got you here may not get you there.*”

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational and skills workshops, seminars may help you better answer those 5 questions and benefit you...

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detached from their job.” This workplace mindset, describes Gallup, is “an approach to work in which individuals meet the minimum requirements of their job description but nothing more—no discretionary effort, no going above and beyond.”

Quiet quitters make up over half of the US workforce, engaged workers remain at 32%, and actively disengaged increased to 18% in Q2 2022. Jim Harter, PhD, points to an increasing disconnect between employers and employees.

“The overall decline was especially related to clarity of expectations, opportunities to learn and grow, feeling cared about, and a connection to the organization’s mission or purpose,” writes Harter.

No matter what your full-time job or role in life, most of us are part-time motivators. We need colleagues to complete tasks, partners to do their share, and children to become self-sufficient and responsible. And, we need to motivate ourselves.

The Search for Meaning

Motivation can’t be reduced to a formula or list of steps to check off. In [Payoff: The Hidden Logic that Shapes Our Motivations](#) (Simon & Schuster/TED, 2016), Dan Ariely writes, “It’s about connecting more deeply to what we do, to the outcome of our efforts, to others, and to our relationships.”

Motivation drives us to achieve tasks that are difficult, challenging, and painful. We use motivation when there’s something that must be done to achieve a larger goal. When we are motivated, we will do things without joy and under unpleasant conditions. This is because the things that give a sense of meaning to life aren’t always the things that make us happy.

Humans care more deeply about meaning than simple happiness. Most of us will do whatever it takes to find meaning and feelings of connection. We motivate ourselves in a quest to find a purpose or cause bigger than ourselves and our daily routines.

“Knowing what drives us and others is an essential step toward enhancing the inherent joy—and minimizing the confusion—in our lives,” writes Ariely.

The Power of Acknowledgment

The reasons for disengagement at work are complex and not easily remedied. Negative motivation plays a big role. We quite easily become

offenders against human motivation when we ignore, criticize, disregard, or destroy the work of others.

According to [data](#) recently published in [Harvard Business Review](#), “quiet quitting is about bad bosses, not bad employees.”

When we are not acknowledged, we lose much of our motivation. Conversely, when we are acknowledged for our work, we are willing to work harder, and in some cases, for less pay.

Research reveals that when we acknowledge others—their efforts, contributions, or being—strong human connections are experienced. This reinforces social interactions and boosts motivation, energy, and cooperation in both parties.

Consider the wise 18th Century texts that encourage the use of these powerful words:

*“How wonderful you are in your being.
I’m glad you are here.”*

Great leaders and managers understand this and make it a practice to acknowledge others.

Cultivate Intrinsic Motivation

We are driven by all sorts of intangible, emotional forces, some of which we are aware yet a large portion remains hidden from our own consciousness. We all have basic needs to be recognized and to feel ownership. We want to feel a sense of accomplishment and autonomy. We want to experience a degree of control and need to know that what we say and do matters.

We crave security and will work long and hard for long-term commitments. Ultimately we strive to achieve a sense of shared purpose. We want to feel that our work and our lives matter even after death.

Self-motivation involves higher levels of personal involvement that motivate us beyond contracts or expectations of others. When we are driven to express our own desires, interests, values and strengths, we can achieve incredible levels of development and performance. It’s termed intrinsic motivation because it comes from internal sources.

Nothing is stronger than intrinsic motivation, and when we connect with it, we exert considerable effort without any expectation of reward. The performance itself becomes its own reward. When we use internal capabilities of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation, we act in ways that enhance knowledge, trust, and personal power—all fundamental to success.

The solution to finding self-motivation, energy, and drive lies in tapping into three concepts represented by the acronym **AWE**:

A = Autonomy: Establish control and self-determination

W = Why: Link tasks to meaningful values

E = Establish choice: Make a small decision, then act on it

1. Autonomy: Establish Control and Self-determination

A prerequisite to motivation is the belief that one has some degree of control over actions, choices, and environment. When people believe they are in control, they work harder and push themselves more.

“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.” ~ Susan Fowler, [*Why Motivating People Doesn't Work...and What Does: The New Science of Leading, Energizing, and Engaging*](#) (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014)

As adults, we never lose the need for autonomy. Productivity significantly increases for blue-collar workers in manufacturing plants who 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.

A sense of autonomy is so crucial to human needs that people who believe they have control over themselves often live longer than their peers.

2. “Why?” Link Purpose and Value to Tasks

If you want to stir up motivation and energy, ask yourself why a task is important. Why should you do this? Then ask the “So what?” question five times, drilling down to core values about why even the smallest of chores will lead to important results.

Unless you know the big picture reasons for doing something, you won't be self-motivated. Knowing the “why” behind a task can turn any chore into a meaningful challenge because you associate it with a purpose, passion, or desire to be of service to others. It is often easier to make efforts for friends or family or for a cause greater than ourselves.

3. Establish Choice, Then Act

One way we prove to ourselves that we have control is by choosing and making decisions. To create self-motivation, take advantage of opportunities to make choices which provide a sense of self-determination.

This suggests an easy method to trigger the energy: find a choice; make almost any choice that allows you to exert control. For example, if you need to write an article, make a list of possible subtopics you want to cover. Or start by writing the conclusion. Whatever small choice you make will start the project and generate self-motivation and energy.

Manage Procrastination

Procrastination may be a warning sign, but when faced with deadlines and commitments, try this:

- Resist the temptation to figure out why you are procrastinating (right now.) Focus on breaking down the project into small, manageable parts. If you get started on small chunks of the project, you'll have plenty of time and energy to analyze it afterwards.
- Don't let feelings interfere with focusing on a task. Self-doubt, resentments, and insecurities are typical, but it ultimately doesn't matter. Remember that motivational slogan, “Just do it!” When you focus on getting some aspect of the task done, you'll find your emotions naturally taking a back seat.
- Don't pressure yourself by thinking about how little time is left. When you start breaking down a project into small steps, you'll discover how much time is realistically required.
- Manage stress. Practice deep breathing, progressive relaxation, visualization, physical exercise, meditation, humor, and music to manage stress and anxiety. Research has proven the many benefits of daily practice; in addition, reward yourself with these activities *after* you've completed a part of the task.
- Turn off all electronic devices (phones, music, etc.) and avoid eating or drinking until you are underway (and have found a state of “flow.”)
- Avoid making excuses. If you find yourself coming up with good reasons to procrastinate, remember that good reasons make for good excuses, but they're still excuses and will stop you from doing what's needed and what's important.



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