

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

What You Need to Know About Motivation

A group of junior-level executives were participating in a management training program. The seminar leader pounded home his point about the need to make decisions and take action on these decisions. "For instance," he said, "if you had five frogs on a log and three of them decided to jump, how many frogs would you have left on the log?"

The answers from the group were unanimous: "Two." "Wrong," replied the speaker, "there would still be five because there is a difference between deciding to jump and jumping."

The point is well made. An ongoing challenge in business is figuring out how to motivate employees to take action, take risks, and become entrepreneurial.

According to Merriam-Webster the word *motive* comes from Medieval Latin *motivus*.

Adjective:

1. moving or tending to move to action
2. of or relating to motion or the causing of motion <*motive energy*>

Noun:

1. something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act

The catch is, the people you need to energize the most are the only ones that can make the decision to move into action and change their behavior. Why?

As we have learned, *Motivation to act* comes from within a person because of having "a need or desire" to do so. The things that motivate a person can be altruistic or selfish. For example; receiving commissions, gaining recognition, fear of losing a job, impressing others, or helping others, are all reasons to move into action.

Although motivation comes from within a person it can be stimulated externally. That's why companies hire "motivational speakers". They hope to create a new way of looking at things, to stimulate enthusiasm or ignite the soul. And sometimes it works (for a while). Usually however, it's short-term at best.

Three principles for long-term motivation

1) Its the people

Albert Einstein said, "*The height of complexity is simplicity.*" Starting with the premise that a company's basic component is its people; the focus should be on getting the individuals in the team to contribute to the whole. Focusing on the team as a single entity is too broad.

Getting a person motivated requires knowing answers to the following questions. What drives each person on your team? Is it money, helping others, research, principles? What's important to one person may not be as important to their teammate. What is each employee committed to? Is it retiring at age 45, achieving a certain life style, becoming president of the company? What are their goals, both professional and personal?

Accurate knowledge, discernment and understanding will show you how to help a person light the fire within. This type of information opens the door to creating alignment between the person and the company vision or department goals. When there is alignment, motivation follows.

2) Showing Appreciation

William James a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher, once stated, “*One of the greatest needs that people have is the need to feel appreciated.*” Appreciation is another key to motivation.

Most everyone starts out motivated and wanting to do a good job. They don't come to work thinking “I'm going to be a real screw up today...” Unfortunately, some are made to feel that way. If a person believes that they would not be missed at the workplace or feels unimportant, they quickly become de-motivated. As soon as people begin feeling unappreciated they start looking for those who would appreciate their talents. They may transfer to another department or leave your company entirely hoping to find that up-building environment.

If you are now looking to motivate someone, reflect on why they now need to be motivated again. Common sense says that when you hired them they were motivated. Am I right in thinking that you wouldn't hire someone who was not motivated? So what happened to de-motivate this person? How did you, or their manager, or the systems you have in place cause the misalignment between them and their job? If you are able to look at this problem honestly you are well on your way to fixing this component of the motivation issue.

3) Creating the right environment

Creating an environment that allows people to stretch and grow, keeps people energized. It's the kind of environment that focuses on what's working, and not on problems. It's forward looking.

This environment is one where people see and believe in the vision. They know what they are working for and become energized by it. When employees see themselves as an integral part of the mission they move into alignment and have a purpose. This kind of environment causes team members to raise their hands and take ownership of new projects.

Giving people the opportunity to succeed and celebrating personal and professional success is vital to producing positive results. The outcome is that positive thinking people will promote positive attitudes in others. This translates into the kind of group dynamics which create long-term highly motivated teams.

By Jason Kleid