

Cracking the Motivation Code

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A very good friend of mine asked me if there was something new about motivating people for bringing out the best in them, and what could he read to enhance his knowledge foundation. My answer was that indeed there was much still to learn about the psychology of motivation. The intellectual logic is that the only way to get people to like working hard and with quality is to motivate them in a sound manner. The word motivation comes from the Latin word *motivus*, meaning movement. Whenever anything is being accomplished (done or executed), it is because someone is obsessively working toward a mission or a goal. This venture is about recognizing that people are essential for organizations to succeed. It is also about building an internal environment for people who want to be exceptional at their job and who want to be proud of where they work.

I can say that motivation is not about giving people what they do not deserve or showering them with benefits and rewards so they work more hours or accept poor working conditions. Motivating is a spark within human beings. It consists on sustaining extra-energy and making people capable of joint high performance to achieve quick, visible and dramatic results.

People work better and put greater effort under the climate of approval than under the setting of constant criticism. Thus, keeping in mind what motivates them is essential. In synthesis, people want:

1. Fair treatment in pay, benefits and job security.
2. The opportunity to grow, to achieve and to take pride in their work.
3. Good relationships with their coworkers.

Therefore, motivation is the art and science of getting people to do what they have to do because they want to do it. There are two books that I recommended to my friend and everyone else who is interested in this topic. These books depict motivation management as a fundamental role of leaders within a very complex competitive environment.

1. Corps Business: The 30 Management Principles of the US Marines, by David H. Freedman; stressing the values of sacrifice, perseverance, integrity, commitment and loyalty.
2. What Really Works: The 4 x 2 Formula of Sustained Business Success, by Joyce, Nohria and Roberson; based on a ground-breaking 5 years study, analyzing data on 200 management practices gathered over a 10 years period and revealing the motivation and effectiveness practices that truly matter and make a difference.

Motivation management is also about wisely leading with the power of expectations. It is about having faith in your team by empowering the members with knowledge, resources, confidence and authority. Motivation and micromanaging do not go hand to hand. The following key sentiments have to be displayed:

1. Trust – you assign a task with the certainty that it will be done.
2. Confidence – you believe that the person will perform according to your expectations.
3. Respect - you treat human beings the way you would like to be treated.

Dear friend, have patience and allow me to review you the classic research of a clinical look at motivation by the great scholar David McClelland. He suggested that human motivation was based on three dominant needs: the needs for achievement, power and affiliation. To measure these needs, McClelland developed the “Thematic Apperception Test”. Subjects were asked to look at 31 images of different social and interpersonal situations and to make up a story about each one of them. The researchers then interpreted the stories to establish what they reveal about the person’s needs for achievement, affiliation and power. Today, the results of the test are used to suggest the type of job that would best suit that individual, and to recommend a kind of motivation structure.

Nonverbal communication can be a powerful motivational tool. Some power points are the following:

1. Eye contact expresses sincerity and holds the listener's attention.
2. Smiling when you speak makes people want to focus on you.
3. Relaxed arms and open palms suggest honesty.
4. Leaning forward signals an attitude of concentration and acceptance.
5. Leaning backward and putting your hands behind your head suggest doubt, resistance and fear.
6. Crossed arms, furrowed brow and lack of eye contact imply tension and disagreement.

The constant combative, angry or critical, deeming confronter does not solve problems but instead drives them more deeply into hiding. People who are doing the quality-right work are the moving force behind any organization. It is the right people doing the right job who are the most important asset for the organization.

The behavioral principle is the following: After people start doing the right thing that is when the motivation comes and makes it easy for them to keep doing it.

As it is well known, all clever strategies and advanced technologies need of great motivated people to put them to work. If someone quickly says that motivation doesn't last long, our recommendation is that he/she motivates others daily. At the end of the day, management is nothing more than motivating other people to do a great job.

Finally, to my distinguished friend, I can empirically say, that indeed recognition can fuel motivation. But be careful because there are occasions when recognition and rewards don't work. They don't work when leaders misuse them. Extending recognition or rewards that are disingenuous or overdone can backfire. An employee of the month award can get fatigued if it is not well deserved. Bonuses that are handed out to everyone at the same time each year (perhaps with the purpose of retention) may become perceived as entitlements and lose their effectiveness as reinforces.

Organizations and their leaders have to be sure to keep recognition and rewards meaningful, special and at times unexpected. Try good surprises for good people. I have never known anyone to complain about receiving

good surprises or too much positive feedback. Regular reinforcement and positive feedback lose impact if they can be expected or predicted. Thus, unpredictable and intermittent motivational undertakings work better.

To conclude, I strongly recommended to my friends to read- Thad Green's, Motivation Management: Fueling Performance by Discovering What People Believe About Themselves and Their Organizations. He empirically shows the connection between motivation and execution, stressing three behavioral keys to achieve such condition: Confidence, Trust and Satisfaction to solve problems, induce performance, improve decisions, and make transformation possible, guide best working and hiring practices.

The task is about cracking the motivational code.

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