

Talent Development 2 – Stop Trying to Motivate Workers

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As a training and development professional, how many times a week do you hear leaders say, “We’ve got to motivate our people?” Believe it or not, that phrase often leads to lower rather than higher motivation.

Seeking to motivate people is the most common thought pattern leaders use every day, so what’s wrong with it?

Trying to motivate people shows a lack of understanding about what motivation is and how it is achieved.

Leaders who think this way put the cart before the horse and do not make the necessary mind shift to do the things that actually do improve motivation.

So, what is the cart and what is the horse? The cart is the culture of the organization that either enables or extinguishes motivation. The horse is how satisfied people feel at any particular moment.

. Why do leaders reverse the conventional order; try to motivate people by making them feel good?

1. Poor understanding of motivation –

The notion that by adding perks or benefits we somehow make people more motivated is flawed. Over 50 years ago, Frederick Herzberg taught us that increasing the so-called “hygiene factors” is a good way to sweeten things (reduce dissatisfaction), but a poor way to increase motivation.

Why? – because goodies like parties, bonuses, hat days, games, , etc. often help people become happier at work, but they do little to impact the reasons they are motivated to do their best work.

2. Taking the easy way out –

Many leaders believe that by heaping nice things on top of people it will feel like a better culture. The only way to improve the culture is to build trust.

By focusing on a better culture, managers enable people to motivate themselves.

3. Using the wrong approach –

It is difficult to motivate another person. You can scare a person into compliance, but that's not motivation, it is fear.

You can bribe a person into feeling happy, but that's not motivation it is temporary euphoria that is quickly replaced by a "what have you done for me lately" mentality.

4. Focusing on perks –

Individuals will gladly accept any kind of perk the boss is willing to hand out, but the reason they go the extra mile is a personal choice based on the level of motivational factors, not the size of the reward.

Putting the horse in front of the cart means working on the culture to build trust first.

Improving the motivating factors, such as authority, reinforcement, growth, and responsibility creates the right environment. Motivation within people will happen, and it will endure.

Why do I make this distinction? I believe motivation comes from within each of us. As a manager or leader, I do not believe you or anyone else can motivate other people.

What you can do is create a process or culture whereby employees will decide to become motivated to perform at peak levels. An example is when you set a vision and goals then allow people to use their initiative to get the job done as they see fit.

How can we tell when a leader has the wrong understanding about motivation? A clear signal is when the word "motivate" is used as a verb – for example, "Let's see if we can motivate the team by having a picnic."

If leaders seek to change other people's attitude about work with perks, they are going to be disappointed frequently. To motivate is not something you "do to other people," rather it is something that is always within people that only they choose to let come out.

Using the word "motivation" as a noun usually shows a better understanding – "Let's increase the motivation in our workforce by giving the team more autonomy."

An organization where all people are pursuing a common vision in a healthy environment of trust has a sustainable competitive advantage due to high employee

motivation. The way to create this is to build a culture of TRUST and affection within the organization.

You accomplish this through consistency and by letting people know it is safe to voice their opinion without fear of reprisal. You work to inspire people with a vision of a better existence for them and by really hearing their input. Doing this helps employees become motivated because:

- They feel a part of a winning team and do not want to let the team down. Being a winner is fun.
- They feel both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards when they are doing their best work, and that is what drives their behaviors.
- They appreciate their co-workers and seek ways to help them physically and emotionally.
- They understand the goals of the organization and are personally committed to help as much as they can in the pursuit of the goals.
- They truly enjoy the social interactions with peers. They feel that going to work is a little like going bowling, except they are distributing computers instead of rolling a ball at wooden pins.
- They deeply respect their leaders and want them to be successful.
- They feel like they are part owners of the company and want it to succeed. By doing so, they bring success to themselves and their friends at work.
- They feel recognized for their many contributions and feel wonderful about that. If there is a picnic or a cash bonus, that is just the icing on the cake: not the full meal.

For an organization, “culture” means how people interact, what they believe, and how they create. If you could peel off the roof of an organization, you would see the manifestations of the culture in the physical world.

The actual culture is more esoteric because it resides in the hearts and minds of the society. It is the impetus for observable behaviors.

Achieving a state where all people are fully engaged is a large undertaking. It requires tremendous focus and leadership to achieve. It cannot be something you do on Tuesday afternoons or when you have special meetings.

Describe it as a new way of life rather than a program. You should see evidence of this in every nook and cranny of the organization.

Do not put the cart in front of the horse by attempting to motivate people with special events or gifts. Instead, increase the motivating factors and build a culture of trust. The end result is that many people will choose to be highly motivated, and the organization will prosper.

The preceding information was adapted from the book **Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on www.leadergrow.com.

Robert Whipple is also the author of **The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals**, **Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online**, and **Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change**. Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders.