
Sustainable Motivation

For all the business owners, executives, managers, department heads, supervisors, or team leaders out there, I have some good news... and I have some bad news... regarding the concept of motivation.

Let's start with the bad news; It is impossible to motivate anyone. The good news? People already come motivated... your job is to find out what that is for each person.



Motivation, as a term, is based on the word “motive” and refers to a conscious or unconscious needs which causes us to take action.

For millennia, leaders at every level in every walk of life have strived to find the magic wand or silver bullet that would get their people to consistently put forth extra effort. Two primary strategies have dominated attempts to motivate over the centuries, fear and rewards. During the most recent two decades a third strategy has begun to emerge. Let's take a look at each against two important criteria;

1. Is the stimulus for the motivation internal or external?, and;
2. Is the resultant motivation temporary or permanent?

Fear Motivation

From the beginning of time fear has been used as a motivational tool. The biggest caveman with the biggest club likely had his way by threatening to give the biggest knot on the head of anyone who challenged or disagreed with him. Up until the advent of aspirin, it probably make sense to let him have his way as often as possible. Business and industry have also used fear through veiled threats of layoffs, firings, reduction of pay, or demotions.

The problem with using fear as a primary motivational strategy is that the very essence of fear is negative. Anything produced under the stress of fear is second-rate at best. People often become



accustomed to the threats, especially if punishment is not delivered as promised. Additionally, a person's ability to tolerate the stress of fear over long periods of time produces a callous "thick-skinned" attitude, necessitating their use of psychological defenses and resulting in a decrease of quality production. Fear can be highly motivating. However, since the stimulus for the fear is external to the individual, its impact is temporary. Fear is a motivator - but not in conjunction with positive results for any length of time.

Incentive Motivation

Motivation by incentive promises a reward, usually tangible, in exchange for some specific behavior or action. Incentive motivation is used by many companies in many forms, and is sometimes an effective motivational tool. As people go through life, they want to receive some of its rewards. Good food, a comfortable home, and other luxuries are all items that money can buy. But, sooner or later, you realize that there are also intangible rewards that hold special personal importance, such as recognition for your efforts, a sense of security, freedom, or prestige.

Organizations that rely on motivation by incentive often struggle with sustaining their efforts and the positive effects they desire. Why? Simply put, this year's bonus becomes next year's expectation... and if that expectation isn't met, the results can have a substantial de-motivating effect. Secondly, consider how long it took you to get used to your last pay raise... most likely, its ability to motivate you probably ended about the time you deposited that first check.

Just like fear, the stimulation for incentive motivation originates outside the individual, it's external, and it's temporary. Not much difference is there?

Attitude Motivation

Lets assume you work for me, and my attitude is: "The more you help me achieve my goals, the more I will help you achieve yours." Where does that motivation stimulus come from, from inside or outside the individual? It's internal. And, is it temporary or permanent? Since our attitudes, or habits of thought, tend to be consistent (they rarely change unless some event, or a conscious effort, is made to change them), attitude motivation is more permanent.

The key to implementing attitude motivation is meaningful and measurable goal setting. Goal setting and action planning provide both the means and the end results for our need to strive and accomplish. Goals provide an effective, results-oriented system for recognizing the needs and achievements of your people.



Attitude motivation is not an easy course of action. You are dealing with thought habits, yours and your people's, accumulated over a period of years through experience and conditioning. The challenge confronting you today is creating the conditions and develop goals, plans, and procedures that capitalize upon the power of satisfying the intangible needs of your people.

Fear and incentive motivation can be used temporarily... but for less than lasting results. For many reasons, they are no longer as effective as they were in previous eras.

In your own development, you should be seeking ways to increase your own self-motivation, and creating an environment that is focused on bringing about a more permanent improvement in your people. Any significant and lasting improvement, for both you and your people, must be tied closely to a goal-based motivational system that has a positive effect on basic internal attitudes.

