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Motivation = Empowerment

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Motivation in the workplace isn't about what you do for your employees; it's about the work you empower your employees to do for you.

Like many managers, you may assume that motivating employees means doing things *for* them, such as paying annual bonuses, awarding free travel and giving time off. It might surprise you to learn that research actually shows that while these types of extrinsic rewards may cause a short-term burst of productivity, they also contain the seed for de-motivation in the long term.

Why? Because once they are awarded, they become expected. So when revenues dictate that bonuses are smaller and vacation days are fewer, people aren't just unmotivated, they actually become less satisfied with their jobs overall.

This realization is at the heart of the work and research of the man known as the father of modern motivation, Frederick Herzberg.

A noted psychologist and one of the most influential names in business management, Herzberg's research showed that while the absence of certain basic things -- like good working conditions and an appropriate salary -- contributed to job dissatisfaction, they didn't necessarily increase job satisfaction. In other words, they definitely de-motivate when absent, but don't necessarily motivate when present.

So what does motivate people to work harder and perform at their best? According to Herzberg's research, real motivators include achievement, recognition, meaningful work, responsibility, advancement and growth. In addition, if retention is a concern, then consider that the number one reason given for leaving a job is dissatisfaction with supervisors.

No matter what type of work your employees do, you can begin to make changes in the way you manage and in your workplace that will create a more stable and motivating work environment.

Understand the difference between motivation and reward.

According to Herzberg's research, real motivation comes from the work itself, not the rewards given for doing the work. His research shows that providing more money, less time at work and better fringe benefits in the name of motivation only motivates people to expect them and ask for more.

When you are about to make a change intended to motivate, ask yourself: how will this contribute to the person's sense of achievement or recognition? Will it enable him or her to grow and be prepared to take on more responsibility? Does it make the work more meaningful to the person? If you can't answer yes to one of these, then recognize that while it may make the person feel rewarded for a job well done, it probably won't provide the long-term motivation you're hoping to achieve.

Recognize that people are natural problem-solvers.

You've heard the saying "everyone has an opinion" and you know it's true. This is because people are natural problem-solvers. We like to figure things out and determine the way things are done -- especially when we are the ones doing the work.

When you give people the opportunity to express their opinions and provide input about the work process, you create buy-in and ownership of the work. When people feel ownership of their work, they are more likely to own the problems that occur and take on the daily task of finding solutions much more enthusiastically.

In order for people to provide meaningful input into the design of the work process however, they must first clearly understand the desired outcome and the parameters within which they must work to achieve it. Once this is understood, people must then be given latitude to determine *how* they are going to achieve it. Recognizing this natural drive to be an integral part of the solution is a critical first step to motivating people to do their best.

Build Trust: Take time to get to know your people.

Effective managers take time to get to know their people. This area can be a pitfall for entrepreneurs, who have the tendency to focus on the task and not the person. When you make people feel like you care more about the work than you do about them, you make them feel insignificant. Conversely, when an employee feels that his or her manager is as concerned about their well being on the job as they are about the job itself, they are more likely to feel the sense of trust that is critical among high performing teams and organizations.

In addition to creating this vital sense of trust, taking the time to get to know your people will provide invaluable insight into what motivates them. Different people are motivated by different things. While one person might be stoked to be designated as project manager, another might feel more achievement if they get to actually produce the desired product once it's determined how it will be done.

This comparison illustrates how different people require varying degrees of structure in order to be happy within their jobs. One way to assess each individual's need for structure

is to ask them to bring in questions about their jobs. Someone who has lots of questions needs more structure; the person who has few questions needs less structure.

Make the transition from problem-solver to coach.

You must also recognize this human drive to problem solve in yourself if you are to make the critical transition from problem-solver to coach that every effective manager must make.

As a manager, your job is to mentor, coach and develop people so they are adequately prepared and supported to do the work on their own. Turning off the impulse to simply provide answers when your employees come to you for help isn't easy, but you must learn to do it. When you always provide answers, you're doing long-term damage to the person, your company and yourself.

First, you're reinforcing the person's lack of confidence in their own problem-solving ability. Second, you're missing an opportunity to teach your people to problem-solve, which will make them better employees and keep your management pipeline filled with good candidates. And finally, you're creating more work for yourself, teaching your people to continue to come to you for answers instead of trying to solve the problems on their own.

Instead of providing answers, ask questions. Asking good questions is a great way to help people learn to problem solve. This Socratic method of coaching gives people the opportunity to discover the answers for themselves, creating sustainable learning that will serve them much longer and better than any solution you simply give them, no matter how ingenious it may be.

Focus on what's working.

As managers learn to make the transition from doing to coaching, it's natural to focus on what's not working. Managers who intervene only when there's a problem are often viewed negatively by their people, who begin to fear every conversation with them. Brain chemistry research shows that this sense of fear of criticism actually triggers the fight or flight response, bathing the brain in fear hormones that increase defensive behavior and actually inhibit learning. And if you only take time to talk to your employees when something's wrong, chances are they'll be defensive and withholding -- decreasing the opportunity you'll find out what you need to know about the job or the person.

To avoid this all-too-common scenario, you must instead intentionally make time to focus on what is working. One way to do this is to schedule regular meetings with your people where they are invited to report their successes. Quite the opposite of the scenario where you only show up to talk about problems, this structured time together will begin to make your people see time with you as a positive experience and something to look forward to, motivating them to achieve even more.

And of course, in the process of learning what's working, you'll inevitably learn about what's not working. But because the interaction starts with attention on what the person is doing right, you've created an atmosphere where people are open to discussion and learning can definitely take place.

BONUS: When you create time for regular positive interactions between management and employees, you also further contribute to the sense of trust between you and your people, which as stated earlier in this article, is critical to high performance among teams and organizations.

Recognize people through responsibility and advancement.

In addition to making time to let people tout their own achievements to you, public recognition is also necessary to extend that achievement into a feeling of responsibility and accountability in the workplace. When people are publicly recognized for a job well done, they experience that sense of achievement all over again, which makes them eager to get back to work and tackle the next problem even more skillfully.

Appropriate recognition for good performance can and should include the awarding of more responsibility and advancement within the company. Using responsibility and advancement as recognition is good for the employee, the manager and the whole organization.

The timing of recognition is important too, so don't wait for the annual awards banquet. Making public recognition spontaneous and frequent will motivate everyone by creating an environment that supports and encourages ongoing learning, achievement and accountability by all.

To truly motivate your people to perform their best, you must provide a work environment that provides achievement, recognition, meaningful work, advancement and growth. You can start to create this work environment by trying out the following six suggestions. First, make sure you understand the difference between motivation and reward. You'll make better decisions on how to do both. Second, recognize that when people feel ownership of their work, they are more likely to own the problems that occur and take on the daily task of finding solutions much more enthusiastically. Third, no matter how busy you are, keep in mind that taking time to get to know your people and what they need at work will pay off big in the long run. Fourth, remember that your job is to coach, mentor and develop your people, not to do their work for them. Fifth, make time each week to focus on what's working. And finally, publicly recognize people frequently on their performance, awarding responsibility and advancing them up in the organization as soon as they've demonstrated that they can do it.

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