



# Motivation: A Leader's Primary Function

**A** leader's primary role is to get others to follow, and much of that falls into the realm of motivation. A great deal has been written about this important topic, but many misconceptions still survive.

Technically speaking, no one can motivate another person. Motivation is something that originates inside people. A leader can create an environment where people are better compelled to do the things a leader wants, but she or he can't directly motivate them. For instance, even threatening to fire someone may not get them to do what you want!

What you as the leader can do is create an atmosphere where people's internal motivation can come alive. Learn what motivates an individual, and see how this ties into the organizational needs. Make sure there are no de-motivating things in the surroundings such as an unhealthy or uncomfortable environment, poor communication, poorly conveyed expectations, inadequate training, micromanagement, or uncaring attitudes.

Here are some things to keep in mind regarding motivation:

- 1** Motivation is personal. While it is good to be aware of the overall generational differences in the workplace, don't think these stereotypes all apply to everyone in a particular age group. A good leader still takes the time to learn what motivates each individual.
- 2** The effect of fear and other external "motivators" (even things like bonuses) will likely diminish. Over time, people adjust to external factors, and will need more to be compelled into action.
- 3** Fear is negative and exhausting, and therefore can't compare with positive, internal motivation. Internal motivation is much more effective and longer lasting.
- 4** People's motivation often lines up with their strengths. Consider your people's strengths when assigning tasks.
- 5** People need clear goals and expectations, and consistent communication in order to remain motivated.
- 6** Motivation is different from manipulation. Manipulation is getting others to do something they don't really care to do, and when little personal benefit is anticipated. Getting your employees to feel motivated about something happens when they see how the results will clearly benefit them.
- 7** People often say money is what motivates them. However, it usually isn't the money itself, but rather what the money will bring. While this certainly includes material things, it may also bring them intangibles such as security or freedom. Ask your people what wanting more money actually represents, and you will be much closer to knowing what motivates them.

**8** Don't assume everyone likes public recognition. Some people would rather have private recognition.

**9** While group motivation is certainly possible, and teamwork has its own desirable dynamics, ultimately motivation comes from inside each person.

## Conducting a Motivation Plan

Each person who works for you should have a motivation plan. As a leader, you may think you know what motivates your people and "makes them tick," but you may be surprised. We have heard many leaders say they know their people well and later on found out differently.

People will usually appreciate that you want to learn more about them. Schedule a time to meet with each of your people for about 20 minutes. Give each your undivided attention during this time. Make notes for future reference. Ask your people things like:

- What are your personal and business goals?
- What types of activities do you like to do on the job?
- What do you believe are your strengths?
- What can I do to help you be even more successful or make your job easier?

Learn from this meeting and determine how you can tie what motivates each team member to the organizational needs. You may be able to do this right in the meeting, but it may also be something you will have to put more thought into. In any case, get back with the person to discuss it with them. You may be pleasantly surprised when their face lights up, as they realize you have put serious thought into helping them become more motivated and fulfilled on their job!

Things change with people, so it's a good idea to update motivation plans at least every year. Something this important, however, shouldn't be relegated to merely another annual cycle. An ongoing dialog throughout the year will prove mutually productive.

Above just about everything else, how well their people are motivated is the measure of a good leader's abilities. A great saying to exemplify this is: "What is the gauge of a good leader? It is what their people do when the leader isn't there!" If the leader has done a good job of creating an atmosphere where everyone's internal motivation is engaged, things will hum right along without the leader's constant presence. **LAN**

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