

How Do I Motivate And Lead My People?

BY BEN PITMAN

Executive Summary

Is it possible to motivate your employees? Some people say yes, while others say it's not, contending that motivation must come from within the person. Either way, however, it's a manager's responsibility to create an environment in which employees' natural motivation effectively operates to produce desirable results for the company and themselves.

In this article, we'll take a look at the important roles that leadership and motivation play in being an effective manager. The first section of this article covers some of the causes of motivation. The next section reviews the general processes of motivation. And the last section discusses some of the aspects of leadership connected directly with motivation.

Is it possible to motivate your employees? Some people say it is, while others say it's not, contending that motivation must come from within the person. I would ask those people the opposite question: "Can you do things that will de-motivate your people?" I am sure most of us would answer "yes," having experienced managers who squashed any motivation that we had. So what we managers are about is creating an environment in which employees' natural motivation effectively operates to produce results that are desirable for the company and themselves.

In this article, we'll take a look at the important roles that leadership and motivation play in being an effective manager. The first section of this article covers some of the causes of motivation. The next section reviews the general processes of motivation. And the last section discusses some of the aspects of leadership connected directly with motivation.

Causes Of Motivation

Pleasure/Pain

The earliest ideas about motivation are still very true today. In general, people seek pleasure and try to avoid pain. When this concept was first formulated, it referred to purely physical pleasure and pain. Today, we realize that people go well beyond the

physical into the psychological, social and spiritual areas.

Push Me/Pull Me

Some people are motivated to gain positive (pleasurable) things. This is sometimes called "achievement" motivation. Other people are more motivated to avoid negative (painful) situations, which is sometimes referred to as "protective" motivation. Here are a few things people are motivated to gain: power, recognition, security, friendship/companionship, achievement, personal growth, independence, order in their world, understanding (of a situation), knowledge and, of course, physical pleasure. Some things people are motivated to avoid: insecurity, abuse by supervisors or fellow employees, inequitable pay, poor working conditions, and excessive order or constraints. I'm sure you can think of many more.

Different Strokes For Different Folks

People are different and, thus, are motivated to do different things for different reasons. Something that motivates one person may not motivate the next. For example, some people want security, while others want a certain amount of insecurity to keep them moving. Some want independence and freedom to act as they choose, while others do not want the responsibility of such actions and thus avoid highly independent situations. Also, people may do

something (like work) for several reasons at the same time: to pay the bills, grow personally, be with a certain group of people or to do a certain thing. Why do you work? Most people work primarily to pay the bills, but many also enjoy the work itself.

Here is a list of specific things — over and above the obvious raise, promotion or better equipment — that you as managers have available to motivate your people:

1. Let them think for themselves.
2. Help them see the end result of their work.
3. Assign them interesting work when possible.
4. Keep them informed.
5. Listen to them.
6. Respect them.
7. Recognize them for their efforts.
8. Challenge them.
9. Provide opportunities for increased skill development.

People perceive things differently. As a manager, you must be sure that you and your employees perceive the situation in the same way. You can do this by simply asking what they think the situation is rather than telling them. For example, when a new project is coming up, you make the announcement. Then later, in a one-on-one environment, ask your people what they see the positives and negatives of the project are likely to be for them personally.

What are the main types of things they talk about? Listen carefully between the lines to what they say.

Why do your people work for you? What do they want? Any manager who doesn't know what his people want is probably doing something that gets in the way of his employees' being highly motivated. So first, make an effort to find out what your employees want. Then go on to the next section, which explores the process of connecting the rewards you can give them with their effort.

Processes Of Motivation

This section reviews how the motivation process takes place and where we as managers may be missing the boat. The information is based on personal experience as well as on solid extensive research by the industrial motivation theorists Porter, Lawler and Vroom.

First, remember that there are two basic classes of rewards. Rewards that satisfy "basic" needs such as food, shelter and good working conditions motivate only until that need is satisfied. When pay is viewed by the employee to satisfy only these needs, it ceases to be a motivator as soon as the person earns enough. Rewards that satisfy "higher" needs motivate continually. These include personal growth, social interaction, recognition (appreciation and respect), pure achievement and power. So tap into this second set whenever you can — thank them, listen to them, involve them in decisions.

Once we know what people want, we still have a lot to do. We have to develop a connection between what we want done and what they want. Here are the parts that make up that connection:

1. Employees must believe that you are able to give them what they want. Some managers promise things they can't deliver — like promotions — and the employees know it. More frequently, managers don't even identify things that the employees want, like respect and recognition for their efforts. Some employees don't believe that

their managers are willing to give these things. To what extent do you actually listen to, respect and recognize your employees?

2. Employees must also believe that they are capable of performing as required. Some tasks are too big. Sometimes the employees have not been trained. Sometimes there is not enough time. Tasks assigned to employees must be challenging, but they must also be within the employees' capabilities. For instance, expecting an assistant with no advanced training in grammar or English to proofread a newsletter is beyond the limits of what that person can do effectively. On the other hand, if an employee is capable of accomplishing a challenging task yet is skeptical, you must communicate your belief that he can do it.

3. Individuals must believe that their effort will lead to the necessary performance. If they work hard, will they get the pay raise, promotion or next good assignment? As a manager, what is your track record here? You must communicate clearly the connection between efforts and rewards.

4. People must believe that the reward is worth the effort. How many of us will work for \$5 an hour? Sometimes the things we ask of our people exceed the benefits they perceive they will get.

5. Finally, employees must believe that the specified performance is connected directly to the desired rewards. Will they get the rewards anyway? Do your people get annual pay raises regardless of their efforts? If

so, then the rewards are NOT directly connected.

It all comes down to trust or belief: If people believe these things, they are very likely to be motivated to act in the ways in which we want them.

You can do two things to develop commitment, to get your team to "buy into" the idea or task. First, tell them the "why" of

the project — why it must be done. People must understand that a job is worth doing before they can be expected to expend any effort in its cause. Once they know why, they will most likely be able to figure out "how" for themselves. Second, let them participate in the decisions surrounding the "how" of the activity. Simply giving them some freedom about how they perform

their job is motivating. It gives people back some of the power they may have lost over the years.

Now, when you see that some

of your people are not motivated to perform well, go back over this section and make sure that you have all these pieces in place. If you do, then you might have lunch with your employees and make sure that they see things in the same way that you do.

Leadership Factors In Motivation

The preceding sections discussed what motivates people (rewards) and how that motivation process takes place. The final section of this article reviews two key factors of leadership that are critical to motivation: adopting the appropriate leadership style and adopting a follower-centered leadership orientation.

Adopt The Appropriate Leadership Style

There are five basic styles of leadership: (1) directive, where you tell your people what is to be done with no input from them; (2) persuasive, where you sell them on your ideas; (3) consultative, where you get their input and then you decide on the course of action; (4) participative, where everyone has input and the group makes the decision; and (5) delegative, where you turn the decision over to them and you are no longer involved.

When you vary your style among the above based on the circumstances, you are using "situational leadership." This simply says that the more people know about the job and the more self-motivated they are, the more input they should have in the decisions that affect them. To be more effective, be aware of the competency levels of your people and then make a conscious

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choice about which style to use. If you find it difficult to shift styles, at least be aware that you have options and know which one of the styles that you tend to use most of the time.

Adopt A "Follower-Centered" Leadership Orientation

Research shows that your effectiveness downward depends to some extent on how much you can influence upward. In other words, the degree to which people below you are motivated and will follow you depends on how effective you are in obtaining resources and favorable decisions for your people from your superiors. Leaders whom people want to follow talk and act in ways that the others perceive is beneficial for them. People perceive that the leader has their interests at heart and not someone else's — like upper management.

Think about the "informal leader" in your office. Certain people are behind other people because they believe in the things that

Your effectiveness in managing subordinates depends somewhat on your influence "upward."

the "informal leader" does. On the other hand, they do what the boss says because they want to keep their jobs. The leader pulls people along while the boss pushes. Of course there are many bosses who do have their people's interests at heart, and these are the bosses who are especially effective.

It really comes down to a question of representation: Whom do you represent? If you represent management, it doesn't take much thought to see that the people below you know whose side you're on. When the chips are down, you won't take the side of the people whom you are trying to motivate; you'll take the side of the people in power. If, on the other hand, you represent the people below you, then you'll have a common vision, you'll share common values and your plans will reflect the things they want to achieve. You'll act in ways that support them and, as a result, they will be more likely to willingly do the things you ask.

Taking this orientation doesn't mean that you defy the people above you in the organization. It doesn't mean that you should do anything your people want. You

still have a job to do. One of your responsibilities as a manager is to get the tasks assigned to your unit done so that the organization can survive and your people will have a job.

However, taking this orientation does mean that you take a stand for your people being treated as people instead of as resources to be exploited.

Here are a few specific things you can do to implement this leadership orientation.

1. Know what your followers are about and what is important to them. Simply ask them in casual conversation or in group meetings what they like about their company or their jobs, or what their career goals are.

2. Share these same points about yourself with them so that they know who you are.

3. Involve them in planning and decisions whenever possible. Share the power. Delegate whenever possible.

4. Keep them informed at all times, even when things are not firmed up yet. Treat them like kids and they'll act like kids; treat them like adults and they'll act more like adults as time goes on.

5. Take risks on their behalf. Go to bat for them.

6. Recognize their contributions toward the goals you all have.

7. Make a conscious effort to express confidence in them. They can't read your mind.

8. Provide material support whenever possible.

9. Provide moral support at all times.

Remember that your employees have the potential to make you look good or make you look bad. Your leadership and motivation styles will greatly influence which option they choose. **JSM**

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