


Getting the Motivation Message

BY ROBERT GIGNAC



As entrepreneurs, we sometimes have trouble grasping the concept of motivation. Take a closer look at the organizations we lead, subject to rapid change, staffed by intelligent, goal-oriented individuals often suffering from low morale. Why is motivation an issue? If we want someone to do something, all we have to do is ask, right? Not in all instances. To some of us, such behaviour comes naturally. It may be difficult to grasp that certain people must be cajoled, convinced, or bribed into completing tasks. If these individuals cannot see or attain some extrinsic goal in return for performing, they would rather not perform.

There is one primary issue, however: You can't motivate people. Your goal is to provide your staff with an environment that encourages them to motivate themselves. To motivate, organizations often deal with external factors such as good supervisor-employee relations and liberal fringe benefits. Failure to recognize the importance of such things may make employees unhappy, but their presence alone will probably not make employees work all that much harder. Reflect on the number of articles and seminars attempting to answer the question "How do I get employees to do what I want?" To be frank, I don't have all of the answers either. But I'd like to share some ideas on how to move them in the proper direction.

Where did we go wrong?

As a start, let's look at a typical organization. Several of our problems arise from the 'rationalist' view of the organization stemming from the work of Frederick Taylor and the early organizational theorists. These theorists felt that people were simply not designed properly to fit into standard organization charts.

Peters and Waterman in *"In Search of Excellence"* concluded that there are three major contradictions about human nature that affect motivation:

1) Research into 'split-brain' theory yielded the belief that the rational deductive left-brain should be the controlling factor in decision-making. Yet, current research sug-

gests that we tend to reason with myth, stories, and intuition over data.

2) We tend to be creatures of our environment, responding to reward and punishment; yet at the same time, strongly self-motivated and driven from within.

3) Although we behave as though our expressed beliefs are important, our actions speak louder than words. Hence the old expression, "Do as I say, not as I do . . ."

With these major contradictions in human nature, how can we attempt to motivate people? Traditionally, organizations have tended to take a negative view of the people who work for them, although much lip service has been given to the concept of employee empowerment. Organizations verbally berate people for poor performance. Organizations want employees to take risks and extended themselves, but in return, punish failure. They want creativity and innovation, but tend to kill the spirit of the innovator through multilevel bureaucratic blocks. This process may not have been by design, but it nevertheless happened. In fact, it was Henry Ford who quipped, "Why is it when I want to hire someone's hands, they always come attached to someone's head?"

Creating the proper environment

One of the major stepping-stones to understanding motivation is recognizing that it is not always the employee who has the problem. In a vast majority of cases, the structure in which the employee works, or perhaps the people responsible for administering the structure, are the de-motivating factors.

First and foremost, managers must instil a sense of confidence and competence - not because we are trying to be nice - but because it is necessary. Lack of motivation, which can lead to high turnover rates, mediocre performance, absenteeism and other work related problems is simply not good business. In order to reinforce self-confidence, the important key to remember is that people are motivated to work at a level consistent with their own perception of competency. If an employee has negative thoughts about their ability to perform a task, the result will likely be negative.

Put more simply, if managers continually tell workers that they are incompetent bumbling fools, the workers will more than likely live up to that expectation. If this makes it seem like a manager's job is more like that of a coach/cheerleader, you are correct. However, unlike sports teams who need to gather focus for a weekly event, managers must attempt to maintain this focus for approximately 250 days a year.

Why then, in spite of recurring findings, do so many managers and organizations habitually undermine their employee's self-images (*in most cases unconsciously*) and make those they manage feel incompetent? We still seem to hear from the 'boss' most often when things go wrong, even though research indicates people are far more motivated to do good work when our employers interact with us as frequently when things go right. Successful managers have the ability to create high performance expectations that subordinates fulfill.

A brief look at values

An additional way to help motivate people, or to help spot people likely to respond to motivation, is to look at values. Not your values or the values of the organization, but the values of the individuals who work for you. You can tell people to value excellence. You can insist they increase productivity, or explore the need for changes in behaviour. You can train people in an attempt to motivate them, or to increase job skills for both their own personal and company benefits. But, unless the individuals develop their own internal personal commitment to achieve these goals, very little will happen.

People who are the most likely to be motivated in any environment are those whose personal beliefs fit that of the environment in which they work. Sometimes personal beliefs lead to situations where talented people leave what others see as lucrative positions to strike out on their own. Often doing so in order to create an environment which will foster their own beliefs about how to get the best out of people, and they tend to attract those who think like them. In order to instil positive beliefs into ourselves and the people we work

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

with, Charles Garfield has outlined seven value beliefs, taken from his book “Peak Performers”: Achievement, Contribution, Self-development, Creativity, Synergy, Quality and Opportunity. If you can get compatibility on values such as these, you’ll stand a better chance of being successful.

A final thought...

My final thought, while blunt and to the point is nonetheless relevant. This one comes to us courtesy of Frederick Herzberg’s article “One more time: How do we motivate employees?”

“...Use the people you have to the best of their abilities to attain both corporate and personal goals. If you cannot use them then get rid of them. If you can’t get rid of them and you can’t use them, then you can be guaranteed that you will develop a motivation problem...” **SBCM**

Robert Gignac is the owner of Taynac & Associates, offering keynotes/seminars on personal development. Contact him at: rgignac@frinc.com