

Workplace Motivation— The Heart of the Matter

Following is the transcript from a motivational keynote address at a major financial institution.

by Cynthia Schilling

According to numerous surveys, what's the number one fear human beings have? Right. Public speaking. What's the number two fear? Correct. Death.

You know, as I was preparing my thoughts for today I kept weighing the options – speak to you people, die...speak to you people, die... what can I say? I want to live so here I am!

You've asked me to address the topic of employee motivation. Well, I've been a consultant for over fifteen years, worked with all kinds of organizations, and been witness to a lot of motivational programs and tactics. I've co-authored three books that deal with performance improvement for teams and organizations. I've noticed it's not uncommon for a leader to read the latest book by the latest expert and immediately go off and try to implement the findings, almost in cookbook fashion. What I think about motivation is that it is so complex - because people are so complex - that we simply won't find the answer resident in any one book or expert. I have read a lot, observed a lot, and experimented a lot, and I'm still figuring out, or perhaps more importantly "unfiguring out," what works and what doesn't. I'm not an expert in this area. But, like you, I **am** a lifelong learner. So what I'd like to offer you today is four things I am learning about employee motivation.

My purpose isn't to give you the answer; again, I'm one person, and I don't claim to have it, but rather it's to encourage you to think, study, experiment, and take some risks to become a more effective motivator for those within your circle of influence.

No Substitutes for Leadership

When it comes to motivation, the first thing I am learning is, as the late Dr. W. Edwards Deming said, there is no substitute for leadership. Has anyone ever visited the www.despair.com web site? If you haven't, I recommend you do for a good laugh. In a brilliant stroke of marketing, this company capitalized on the inevitable backlash toward those full-color, motivational posters that have found their way into a lot of corporate offices over the past few years. You know the ones I'm talking about. Picture a gorgeous photograph of some guys rowing crew as the sun rises over the lake. Below the photo in all caps is the word: **TEAMWORK**. And below that word is the inspirational phrase, "Together we can reach

the heights of excellence and achieve the extraordinary." You get the picture? Well, at www.despair.com, I ran across the following: Picture: close up of soaring eagle in bright blue sky. All caps: **LEADERS**. Caption: "Leaders are like eagles. We don't have either of them around here."

So yes, I am learning there is no substitute for leadership. Not flashy posters, not Thanksgiving turkeys, not incentive programs, not employee of the month awards, not even consultants like me. And when I say leadership, I mean not just at the very top, but at all levels. In fact, at least two recent major studies, one by The Gallup Organization and one by Development Dimensions International found that an employee's relationship with their immediate supervisor was the single most important factor influencing that employee's decision about whether to stay on the job or quit. In their day-to-day interaction with employees, managers and supervisors shape the culture of an organization, and it is often their individual behavior that either results in motivated employees or causes employees to leave their organization. In short, people don't quit their organization. They quit their manager.

Why People Stay

The second thing I am learning is related to the first one: People have an innate desire to feel appreciated, and this is an extremely powerful but underused motivational tool. In fact, according to Bob Nelson, author of *1001 Ways To Reward Employees*, the number one form of reward desired by employees is verbal appreciation or praise from their immediate boss. The number two desired form of reward is written appreciation or praise by their immediate boss. Nelson also cites a survey showing that about 60 percent of employees believe their immediate boss does not appreciate the work they do. Yes, I think people have a desire to feel needed and appreciated at work, and that people who receive this reinforcement are likely to be happier and more productive.

One Size Doesn't Fit All

I'm also learning, after several painful mistakes over the years (for example, giving *The Field Guide to Eastern Birds* to a female colleague whose idea of a good time is afternoon

tea at the Ritz-Carlton), the wisdom of The Platinum Rule, by Tony Alessandra and Michael O'Connor. They suggest that the Golden Rule is not always the best way to approach people. Instead, they propose the Platinum Rule: Do unto others as they would like done unto them.

Take, for example, a story I heard recently about an employee who had gone five years without missing a day at work. An elaborate awards ceremony was planned, during which he was to receive a plaque for perfect attendance. He was so terrified he'd have to make a speech that on the day of the ceremony he called in sick!

Six Keys to Commitment

So how do you figure out what each employee wants and needs to not just survive but thrive at work? I suggest at least two things – you ask, and you listen. A few years ago, I attended a seminar by Dr. Robert Cooper, author of a recent top selling book, *The Other 90%*. During the seminar, he asked us to write down the four people most vital to our success in the year ahead. Once we had done that (and I really had to think!) he said that if we didn't know the following six things about those four people, we were in trouble. The six things are:

- **To feel recognized and rewarded, I need...**
- **These are the results I can be expected to deliver.**
- **This is what I need to learn and work best.**
- **This is the contribution I plan to make.**
- **These are my values.**
- **This is the work I'm best at and love to do.**

I suggest if you aren't certain about how your people would respond to these statements, you ask and listen. And I don't think you need to feel limited to four people, either.

The Heart of the Matter

Finally, I am learning that emotional intelligence is a primary driver of motivation in the workplace. Is anyone familiar with the emerging science of neurocardiology? Scientists have evidence that there is a cluster of some 40,000 neurons in the heart which operate with their own intelligence, connected with the intelligence in the brain. And when we are hit with an external stimulus, the brain in the heart perceives that stimulus before the brain in the head. Apparently, the instruments used to measure the electromagnetic signals from the heart can pick up those signals from six or more feet away, whereas the electromagnetic signals from the brain can only be picked up when placing the instrument on a person's head. There is an organization in Boulder Creek,

California called the Heartmath Institute that is doing further research on the heart brain. I suspect not half of this story has been discovered yet.

Emotionally intelligent people listen and respond to their heart brain. Emotional intelligence is simply understanding your emotions and the emotions of others and knowing what to do about it. It's made up of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and social skill. I do a lot of work with organizations, facilitating leadership retreats, and I can't tell you the number of times I've been cautioned, "Look we want you to keep emotions out of the proceedings." As if I could if I tried!

Why should you pay attention to emotional intelligence? Research demonstrates that variation in job performance has three main contributing factors: general intelligence (sometimes measured by IQ), Technical Skill (that is, how well-trained are you as an engineer, an artist, an accountant), and emotional intelligence. What many people find shocking is that IQ and Technical ability are entry level requirements. They are necessary but not sufficient. In study after study, emotional intelligence distinguishes those who become star performers from those whose careers derail. Some studies indicate that emotional intelligence accounts for around 85% of successful performance on the job.

The good news is that unlike our IQs which we cannot increase, we can all improve our emotional intelligence through efforts such as training, feedback, self-reflection, and practice. All this would suggest you have a tremendous opportunity to create an environment where motivation can flourish if you work to develop emotionally intelligent managers, supervisors, and employees.

In conclusion, I'll throw in one bonus thing I'm learning. My husband is retired Navy. After we watched the nightly news a couple of weeks ago, I asked him, "Dusty, what would motivate a bunch of kids to go into battle, knowing the potential consequences?" His reply was two words: "They believe." So what I am learning about motivation is that human beings want to believe in something bigger than they alone. They want to count for something, to make a difference, for their lives to have meaning and significance. And, as leaders, perhaps the greatest gift we can give those around us is to help them see and accept that this is true.

RESOURCES

1001 Ways to Inspire Your Organization, Your Team, and Yourself by David E. Tye, Career Press, 1998

From Good to Great by Jim Collins, Harper Collins Publishers, 2001

Love 'Em or Lose 'Em. by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, Berrett-Koehler, 1999

Out of the Crisis by W. Edwards Deming, MIT Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1990

The Other 90% by Robert Cooper, Three Rivers Press, 2001

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership Workbook by John C. Maxwell, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002

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