

## Human Dimension

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*Lack of training can prevent a motivated employee from performing well. What sense is there in hiring a motivated person to do a job and then not training the person to do the job properly?*



# Making Employee Motivation a Partnership

**W**e begin our discussion of a complex topic with a simple question: How can I motivate my employees? We propose a simple yet unique answer: You can't do it alone! Employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employees. In this paper, we will develop this basic argument into several practical take home suggestions for human resource managers and employees to use in improving employee motivation.

We recognize that employee motivation, more accurately the lack of motivation, often frustrates employers. It comes as a surprise to some employers that employees' lack of motivation often frustrates them as well. We observe these frustrations being compounded by the obvious fact that most any approach to motivation will sometimes work for some people. The kicker is that no approach works all the time for all people.

### Some Background Points about Motivation

Motivation is the inner force that drives employee behavior. The intensity of one's inner force to do a task or accomplish a goal describes the level of motivation. Two people may both say and believe they want to be excellent employees. The intensity of their desire to be excellent measures their motivation. Employers pay more attention to what employees do than what they say or believe. Motivation is the force that causes employees to deliver on what they say.

Most employees prefer to be motivated. Why would an employee choose the frustration of not being motivated? Motivating jobs and work environments win praise from employees. Of course, what one person finds motivating another may find boring, frustrating and debilitating. And employees sometimes bring a lot of baggage to the workplace from their childhood experiences, previous employment and failures to find their motivating niches in life.

Motivation is complex. No simple set of guidelines guarantees motivated employees. Motivation provides a never-ending struggle for both employers and employees.

Self-motivation plays a crucial role. Achievers tend to continue achieving. Past accomplishments, challenging career goals, expertise in one or more areas, pride in one's abilities and self-confidence contribute to self-motivation.

An unmotivated person can become motivated. On the other hand, a motivated person can lose motivation. The opportunity to motivate employees is never completely lost nor is the accomplishment of motivated employees ever guaranteed to continue indefinitely.

Not all performance problems are explained by lack of motivation. Lack of training can prevent a motivated employee from performing well. What sense is there in hiring a motivated person to do a job and then not training the person to do the job properly? Lack of appropriate equipment, tools, facilities and supplies can also prevent a motivated person from performing well. Lack of clear expectations, unclear "rules of the game" and muddled messages about desired outcomes can lead to poor performance.

### Satisfying Needs

The simplest and most intuitive approach to motivation is to satisfy an employee's needs. This approach has four parts:

- Employees have needs that they desire to satisfy, **which in turn**
- Leads to actions that will fulfill their needs, **which in turn**
- Leads to rewards from the employer and satisfaction from doing the job, **which in turn**
- Reinforces their actions and causes them to be repeated.

Note the necessity of identifying needs. An employer can get help from employees to identify their needs. Then the employer can choose the "right" employee rewards for doing a job and especially for doing a job well. Providing the "right" rewards reinforces the employees' actions thus causing the employees to repeat the actions to get the rewards again.

To illustrate, Kirk and Kendra are employees who both have a need to be thanked and appreciated. Kirk's employer Jennifer, recognizing the need, gives him specific tasks and responsibilities. When Kirk performs the tasks well, Jennifer regularly shows appreciation by

saying thank you and giving merit increases in pay. Kirk's needs are satisfied. To continue having his need for thanks and appreciation satisfied, he is motivated to continue to do the tasks well.

On the other hand, Kendra's employer John fails to understand her need for thanks and appreciation. Kendra works hard to complete the tasks but John never thanks her or recognizes her accomplishments. Instead, John is quick to criticize Kendra's small mistakes. He offers no thanks or recognition for her correction of the mistakes. At some point, Kendra is likely to lose motivation to continue to do the tasks well. The reason according to this simple needs theory of motivation is that no need is being satisfied.

Note also the necessity of an employee being willing and able to perform the assigned tasks. Unwillingness, for whatever reason, to perform the tasks, means the link between needs and rewards breaks down.

This simple model of motivation makes clear that employee needs play a critical role in motivation. Experienced labor managers, however, easily see practical problems. What at first seems to be a simple model is in fact complex and difficult to apply. Motivation success requires more than the employer's sole reliance on satisfaction of needs. Reinforcement of desired behaviors and cooperation between employer and employee need to be added to the power of needs.

### **A Partnership Between Employer and Employee**

We return to our basic argument: employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employee.

Synergy is the concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Synergy is exactly what we seek to complement the needs approach and positive reinforcement. It means that employer and employee working together accomplish more than they accomplish by each working alone. Lack of synergy in motivation occurs when employee and employer each face the motivation challenge alone. Employee brings his or her self-motivation, experience, good intentions and training to the job. Employer brings his insights about employee needs and rewards.

The motivation partnership means that both employee and employer are committed to synergy rather than waiting for the other to solve

the motivation puzzle. The employer and employee share responsibility for motivation, i.e., cooperation not separation.

### **The Employee's Contributions to the Partnership**

True partnership between employer and employee in the motivation challenge requires each to understand and play their parts well. The employee's most important contribution to the partnership is self-motivation. Most importantly, this self-motivation commits the employee to making the partnership work. Employees also need to search for a job and work environment that fit their knowledge, skills, abilities, needs and interests. A miscast employee almost certainly will eventually face the frustration of waning motivation. No matter how good the fit is between employee and job, the employee must be willing to learn. Even the most experienced employee new to a business should bring admission that "I don't know all I need to know." A highly skilled employee still needs to learn about new coworkers, policies, rules, norms of behavior and just how things "work around here."

Taking a job with a new organization means commitment to that organization's vision, mission, core values and goals. When an employee's goals, needs and beliefs don't fit with the employer's vision, mission, core values and goals, any proposed partnership between employer and employee is almost certainly to disappoint both parties.

The employee has the responsibility to communicate his or her needs, concerns and ideas to the employer. Listening to the employer's point of view is the other side of this communication coin.

On page 13 is a six-step worksheet to assist you in utilizing the information in this article. You can begin to use this worksheet by identifying an employee to work with to develop a motivation partnership and completing step 1.

### **The Employer's Contributions to the Partnership**

Frederick Herzberg developed a two-factor theory of motivation that makes clear what the employer can bring to the motivation partnership. According to Herzberg, two factors affect

*continued on page 12*

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employee motivation: dissatisfiers and motivators. The employer has primary responsibility for both.

Examples of dissatisfiers are poor working conditions, unsafe equipment, exhausting physical work combined with excessively long work days and weeks, unfair pay, disagreeable supervisors, unreasonable rules and policies, unchallenging work and conflict with co-workers. According to Herzberg, these problems must be resolved before motivators can work. Resolving the problems increases employee satisfaction; however, it does not provide motivation.

Motivators are factors that influence job satisfaction and lead to motivation. Examples include achievement, recognition, satisfying work, responsibility and personal growth through training and new experiences. These motivators turn an employee from being neutral about the job into a motivated employee. (See figure 1)

part of the partnership many or most employees will be on the left side of the figure — highly dissatisfied and poorly motivated.

The employer must first remove the dissatisfiers like unfair levels of pay and unacceptable working conditions. Employees will move toward the center of figure as their level of dissatisfaction decreases. They will not yet show many signs of becoming motivated.

As the employer continues to implement her or his part of the partnership by providing motivators, e.g., positive reinforcement, recognition for achievement and increased responsibilities, most employees will move to the right of the figure. They are responding to the employer's fulfilling his or her part of the partnership by providing a motivational work environment.

Note that this is not a time when the employer jumps from the left to the right of the figure. The employer must first focus on removing the dissatisfiers.

Communication with employees is essential. What is a dissatisfier for one employee may not be a dissatisfier for another. A single workaholic employee may have no objection to a 60-hour workweek. Parents with small children may find 60-hour workweeks highly dissatisfying. What is a motivator for one employee may not be for another. Opportunity to learn new skills may be motivating for one employee and a worrisome burden for another employee.

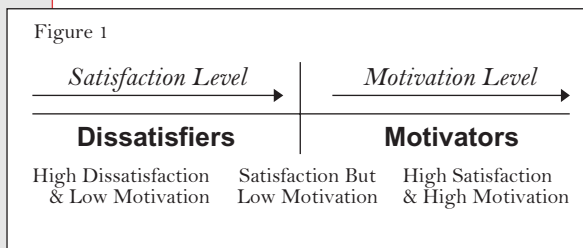
If you are using the worksheet on page 13 to begin the development of a motivation partnership, complete steps 2 and 3 now.

**Summary**

Having motivated employees is a highly worthy goal for any employer. No human resource challenge likely exceeds worker motivation in importance or potential for employer and employee satisfaction. We have presented a nontraditional approach – making motivation a partnership challenge. We have made satisfaction of worker needs, positive reinforcement and removal of impediments to motivation a joint responsibility of employer and employee.

Begin your implementation of an employer/employee partnership by completing steps 3-5 in the worksheet. Continue by working with the selected employee.

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The implications for the employer's side of the motivation partnership are clear. The dissatisfiers must be removed before motivators can work. Employees working in unsafe conditions with unfair pay will not be motivated by recognition and delegation of additional responsibility. However, making the workplace safe and increasing the pay to a fair level is not enough. These steps alone will fail to motivate employees. They will be satisfied but not motivated. These neutral workers can be turned into satisfied and motivated workers by using the motivators, e.g., recognition and delegation of additional responsibility. Each employer can work to identify the dissatisfiers among his or her employees. Removing the dissatisfiers provides opportunity to take advantage of motivators

Figure 1 illustrates the path to providing an environment where employees should be enthused about contributing their part of the employer-employee motivation partnership. When the employer is not contributing their

## Analysis of Your Employer/Employee Motivation Partnership

Identify an employee with whom you would like to improve the employer/employee motivation partnership:

**Step 1:** Check the **employee's contributions** that are present in your current relationship.

- 1. The employee is self-motivated
- 2. The employee is committed to make our motivation partnership work
- 3. The employee's job with me fits his or her knowledge, skills, abilities, needs and interests
- 4. The employee is committed to our organization's mission, values and goals
- 5. The employee listens to my points of view
- 6. The employee communicates his or her needs, concerns and ideas with me
- 7. The employee is willing to learn

**Step 2:** Check the **dissatisfiers** that are present in your current relationship

- 1. Economic factors such as unfair wages and noncompetitive fringe benefits
- 2. Security factors such as lack of grievance procedures and no seniority privileges
- 3. Social needs such as lack of opportunities to know and spend time with peers, e.g., breaks and eating together, business sponsorship of parties and outings
- 4. Status problems including lack of privileges, no job titles and lack of other symbols of rank and position
- 5. Working conditions such as inadequate heat, light, ventilation and equipment; unfair work rules, company policies, discipline procedures and unreasonable hours of work per day and per week

**Step 3:** Check the **motivators** that are present in your current relationship.

- 1. Challenging work
- 2. Feelings of personal accomplishment
- 3. Recognition for contributions to the organization
- 4. Increasing responsibility
- 5. Sense of importance to the organization
- 6. Access to information
- 7. Involvement in decision making

**Step 4:** Note the employee contributions that **you did not** check, the dissatisfiers that **you did** check and the motivators that **you did not** check. These should be the area you emphasize in implementing the partnership

**Step 5:** Chose Path A or Path B for improving the motivation partnership with your employee:

- Path A** → Ask the employee to complete Steps 1-4 on his or her own. Compare the results with your results. Discuss with the employee the 2 most important changes from the employee contribution, dissatisfier and motivator lists that would improve the motivation partnership. Start to make the changes.
- Path B** → Identify, on your own, the 3-5 most important changes from the employee contribution, dissatisfier and motivator lists that you believe would improve the motivation partnership. Start to make the changes.

**Step 6:** Evaluate your progress in the motivation partnership at least once each year.

*Question: How do you motivate employees?*

*Answer: You can't do it alone! Employee motivation works best as a partnership between employer and employees.*

*Use this worksheet in conjunction with the information contained in the article to help develop a motivation partnership between employees and employer.*