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"What's my motivation?"

Manage top employees by giving them what they want

How do I motivate my employees?

You can't.

Well, okay, traditional "carrot and stick" incentives can work up to a point, but both early motivational theorists such as Herzberg and MacGregor and contemporary experts, including Bonnstetter and Suiter, agree that true motivation comes from within. It's that natural and spontaneous inner feeling we get from a desire for accomplishment, rather than a response to others offering hope for gain or fear of loss.

Some would go so far as to say that none of us can motivate another any more than we can change anyone else. What we *can* do is create an environment in which people will want to motivate themselves. It's this kind of managing that companies *must* do to keep their best people.

All people are motivated all the time. When we see workers who appear to be "unmotivated," we likely see them as slouches who aren't doing the job the way we think they should. Maybe they look like they're not enjoying their work. They're probably not, but they're still motivated; they're just motivated to do the job with as little energy as possible, get it over with, and go home. Then it's time for their manager to find out why.

What can managers do that will encourage people to give it their best? Gene Morris, CEO of Morris Marketing in Greenville, says he's worked to create an environment in which his employees look forward to Friday yet don't dread Monday. He believes, "You must empower your people to make decisions that influence the direction of the company; then give them credit and recognition for doing that." Granted, some people may be uncomfortable with that much power, but good managers challenge people to take initiative and responsibility. They encourage all members of the team to run their area as if they were in charge.

The real key to "motivating" employees is to treat each person as he or she wants and needs to be treated. Some people need authority equal to their responsibility. Others want you to write down clear instructions so they can have the security of knowing they're doing the job the way you want it done. Some are motivated by money, others by service, others by a harmonious work environment. And all are motivated by knowing you respect and appreciate them. You do that by showing them you understand their individual needs.

Methods of motivation

The best companies realize that people are different and don't respond to the same motivations. Managers find out what each person needs in order to be happy in his/her job and provide it. This isn't coddling them; it's valuing them.

Some of your staff have a psychological need to socialize during the day, while others would prefer sitting behind closed doors working uninterrupted. The latter are the ones taskmasters appreciate, but don't penalize or stifle your socializers if you want them to

give their best, too. Let them chat for a while, then guide them back to work in a firm but friendly manner.

A friend of mine told me recently she's dissatisfied with her job because she has no authority. Will she go to her boss and tell him that? Probably not, just like your staff won't tell you what they want. It's not something most people feel comfortable doing. Yet bosses aren't mind readers, so how can they know these things?

First, supervisors have to care enough to be willing to manage people as individuals. Motivate by wants and manage by needs. What are some ways to do that? You can meet with each person and ask what he or she needs and wants, hoping they'll tell the truth and not say everything's fine when it's not. You can use time-tested assessments that are proven to determine accurately each person's behavioral style, attitudes, and values and manage them accordingly. You can combine both of these actions, which is what I recommend. Share your profiles with your staff members so they'll know what you want, and study theirs to learn what they want from you. That's real teamwork. When everyone partners and adapts to each other to get the job done - it's easier, more effective, and a lot more fun! And it leads to a healthier bottom line.

So, the key to managing and motivating others is to understand them; then practice the Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them."

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