

## Motivating Your People in a Down Market

As your employees sip morning coffee, skim headlines, and listen to the chirping of talking heads they are assaulted with negativity and fear factors. Their homes are worth less, it cost more than ever to drive to work, banks are failing, and perhaps most devastating of all...their neighborhood Starbucks is closing.

Motivating your work force is more challenging than ever.

Or, is it?

Can your organization be a bastion of hope and source of positive thinking? It is easier than you think. Understanding the basic tenets of motivation is your secret weapon.

Understood, motivation is really more a battle for peoples' hearts than one for their minds.

I am going to introduce you to a motivation framework that the great American philosopher, Mark Twain, most likely envisioned when he said: "Really great people make you feel that you too, can become great."

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## Motivators versus Dissatisfaction

Unfortunately, our misconceptions about motivation probably started with that all too familiar speech given by Mom or Dad, in your rowdy teenage years--you know...the one that starts:

"You need to study hard so you can get a good job and take care of your family."

Frederick Herzberg, an academic interested in workplace psychology, proposed the Motivation-Hygiene Theory in the late 1950s.

The principles of his theory explain the damage your parents did to your motivational skills with the "get-a-good-job" speech.

Herzberg submitted that factors such as job security, salary, and status were all hygiene factors--meaning none of these factors will make people healthier or happier, but their absence will rapidly deteriorate their health or satisfaction.

On the contrary, intrinsic factors like challenging work, recognition, and responsibilities not only make people healthier and better at their jobs--it makes them happy.

Google is genius at applying this motivational principle. Their *Innovation Time Off* program is the clearest example. Google engineers are encouraged to spend 20% of their work time on projects that interest them.

The impact on employee motivation is probably obvious, but what is the benefit to Google?

Marissa Meyer, a Google executive, revealed in a recent Stanford presentation that over half of Google's new product launches originated from these 20% projects.

Ever heard of any of these products? Gmail, Google News, Google Reader, AdSense...

## Motivation Doesn't Last

Now it is time to answer my pessimists in the crowd. I hear your whispers and quips...

"...motivation tricks and gimmicks are nice, but motivation doesn't last."

I most certainly agree with you. And so does Zig Ziglar, one of the grand masters of motivation. His response to this objection was simple...

"People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing--that's why I

recommend it daily."

This is your challenge. As you seek innovation from your employees...you should be applying your 20% project to creating regular doses of motivation.

The auto industry, one of the prominent examples of current US economic distress, are inspiring motivation and innovation by radically changing the environment.

Design divisions are being moved out of Detroit and into centers of creativity...California, London, and Shanghai.

Innovative US sub-compact cars are flowing from International and European production models like the Ford Verve.

And one of the most promising, practical, and production electric car designs comes out of...not a Detroit concept...but a Silicon Valley start-up...Tesla Motors.

## **Regrets Come Not From Does, But From Did Nots**

The interesting thing about studying and applying motivation is that you quickly discover the flaws in adopting popular psychology into your manager's toolbox.

I am here to warn you...Maslow was wrong!

Motivating people by giving them basic needs, wants, and desires is dangerous-- actually de-motivating.

No, in practice, motivation is best achieved by creating opportunities...opportunities for your people to get what they need, want, and desire.

Motivation should inspire action and movement, not reaction or response.

Organizations designed like Pavlov's Dog experiment--creating reflexive behavior from a combination of pain and reward--inspire paralysis. Creating immovable, or worse, mindless wannabes.

Motivation strategies centered on supplying basic needs by avoid mistakes yields, at best, avoidance of employee dissatisfaction.

Your charge is to create an environment where people can do things without undue consequence. An organization more focused on recognizing the exceptional than punishing the failures.

After all, most regrets in life result not from what you do, but what you did not do.

Inspire an organization without regrets.

## **Build on Strengths, Don't Fix Weaknesses**

We all have weaknesses and so will the people you seek to motivate. Fixing bad habits and poor skills are expensive, not to mention bitter medicine for someone to swallow.

Thankfully, Marcus Buckingham gave us a better strategy in his book--"First Break All the Rules." Buckingham advocates we build on strengths and avoid trying to fix up weaknesses.

Unfortunately, when we follow the typical fixer-upper strategy we lose great talent in our organizations simply because these people wander or get recruited into the wrong job.

Attempts to shove that square peg into the round hole only frustrates both manager and employee equally.

At the first sign of de-motivation or poor performance start looking for strengths to leverage. It is cheaper than firing and hiring and most likely you will uncover a rough-cut gem.

## Motivate Individuals Not Groups

Everyone loves a pep rally. Unfortunately, most don't sustain their motivating effects beyond the closing applause.

The military learned long ago...it's hard to motivate thousands of men and women to charge into the face of battle...on the command of one leader.

No, quite to the contrary massive military actions are the combined effects of many discrete, highly motivated, small units.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani understood this principle when he campaigned and won on a promise to clean up one of the World's most infamous crime ridden cities--New York.

Motivated from a single pulpit. Managed in a series of Mayoral speeches to New York City cops...this would have been a guaranteed failure.

However, the results were swift and unimaginable--in four short years the overall crime rate was crushed 57% and the occurrence of murder slashed 67%.

An insurmountable problem was actually motivated at the individual level. He didn't

ask the New York City police chief to lower crime. He ask the individuals to stop crime-police officers on their street corner, precinct captains in their neighborhood, district commanders in their Burroughs, and the Chief in his city.

Motivation is best executed on key leadership and influencers that can create an Army of motivated troops.

## **Conclusion**

You certainly can't stop the media from feeding on negativity. And, employees will probably continue to read newspapers and watch CNN.

However, you now know this is not your concern in motivating employees through a deteriorating economy.

It should also be clear that handing out basic needs and assurances only keeps people on a delicate tipping point between good-enough and disgruntled.

Motivation is best served in frequent doses of challenge, recognition, and responsibility. Finding strengths not fixing weakness. And motivating your key influencers...not hosting foot stomping, hand waving revivals.

Your opportunity is to be the source of optimism, positive thinking, and motivation. Of course, your motivation should be the results--happier people and unimaginable success.

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