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Teams—The Secret to Motivation

Teams and individuals cannot be motivated.

Motivation is what comes from within when people find themselves in an environment that rewards what they value. Such a straight forward concept yet clearly not well implemented.

Whether your team is located physically within the parameters of your office space, or is a virtual team that crosses many boundaries, as the leader, part of your job is to create the environment that will inspire each member of your team to feel motivated and work towards a common goal.

So what do people value besides money? Lots! Each member of your team is unique. They may have some things in common that they value, such as being in a learning environment or sharing a common belief in what your organization stands for. Other things that people value include helpfulness, form and harmony, power, order, and I've already mentioned money.

This work of identifying what causes people to feel motivated dates back to the early 1900's with the work of one Eduard Spranger [1881-1963], followed by Gordon Allport [1897-1967]. Allport's work influenced Maslow who developed the theory of the hierarchy of needs. Subsequently, Bill Bonnstetter [1938-] modernized the study of values and developed an on-line assessment which is used in both personal and workplace settings today.

The secret to creating a motivating environment is to give people what they value. It would not be unusual to have some overlap of a common set of values in an organization or department. Sales, for example, is an example of an area where often the primary or secondary motivator is financial reward. In the social sector, people most often stay because they either believe in the cause and/or want to be helpful to others. In military or para-military organizations, it's often having a sense of order that is motivating. Power or autonomy is a bit different; it plays itself out through one of the others previously mentioned. For example, a person that values power and helpfulness, will possible be driven to use his/her power to help others.

If one of your team members is keen on learning and gaining knowledge, you might consider sending that person on a course that would benefit both the individual and the organization. The person that values money is likely going to feel motivated through a financial incentive. The team member that craves power may be inspired to work harder or produce more if he/she has an opportunity for higher status or autonomy.

Each person has two top motivators that will cause him/her to feel motivated if they are in that environment. The one caution is that once an individual feels satisfied within his/her top two motivators, the individual will be less driven by them and will start to look to others for additional inspiration and fulfillment. A typical example would be a top-performing salesperson that has lost the drive. Quite possibly, this individual has reached his/her level of satisfaction with money and now is no longer willing to put out the additional discretionary effort to gain just a bit more additional financial reward.

If you're looking to motivate or re-energize your team, start paying attention to what your people value and make sure you develop an environment that surrounds them with exactly that.



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