



The Motivation Game

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It's a new year and we want to start it right. If only everyone else on the team was as motivated as we are...What can we do to motivate people?

Having worked with over 100 support organizations I'm no longer surprised to find highly-motivated, hard-working people in every single organization I worked with, even the most badly managed, overwhelmed, dismal environments. These motivated people deliver outstanding service to their customers, are helpful to coworkers, put in extra time to get the work done without being asked, and do their best to improve the place. And some of them have terrible bosses, never given to recognize extraordinary achievement but instead prone to criticizing everything they do.

I also see unmotivated people in many organizations, even the ones where, it seems, it's a pleasure to work with reasonable customers, reasonable processes, and reasonable hours – although to be fair the better-managed organizations seem to be able to identify and move along these productivity boulders more efficiently than others.

So what can we do to motivate people? As it turns out, not much! Motivation comes from within so the secret for managers is to be able to (1) hire people who have the potential of being motivated and (2) kindle the flame on a regular basis. In other words, create an environment that allows motivation to flourish for the long term.

Hire Motivated People

Hiring people who have motivation potential is not dreadfully difficult. It can be done with just two easy steps.

- **Hire against a hiring profile.** Individuals who lack even the skills to learn what needs to be done will get discouraged. On the other hand, overqualified people will get bored. Aim for the perfect middle: candidates who have the skills needed to do the job, perhaps after some basic training, but not so much they can do the job with their brains turned off.

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- **Hire for motivation potential.** Candidates who cannot demonstrate any enthusiasm in prior jobs may have a motivation deficiency. Select candidates who have a history of throwing themselves heart and soul into past jobs, even if they were different types of job than what you are recruiting for. Motivated people tend to be motivated across the board.

Encourage Highly-Motivated People

You will quickly find out which new hires are highly-motivated: they will ask for more to do (gasp!) They will contribute ideas. They will often point to problems that need fixing. And they will work better, faster, more enthusiastically than the rest.

How do you keep them to that high level of motivation? It's mostly a manner of removing obstacles in their way and letting them show their stuff.

- **Get rid of bum managers.** Highly-motivated people don't need someone to tell them what to do; they particularly detest being micro-managed; and, while they understand that not everyone is as gung-ho as they are, they resent dead wood around them, especially if said dead wood is allowed to linger. This means that bum managers sap the wonderful motivation of the highly-motivated: they need to go. And naturally should there be a few *second-level* bum managers they are likely to infect the entire structure under them: out they go. (Remember that poor people managers can manage up very well: how else would they have gotten so far? You must rely on 360-degree reviews and employee surveys to find them, not just your direct impression.)
- **Reduce and remove hassles.** Are you asking your staff to update the case-tracking system in real time and also to file detailed weekly status reports? Is there a tedious bureaucracy in place to purchase as little as a new pencil? Are bugs sitting for weeks while Engineering debates them while your staff has to tap-dance with customers? Any time you can streamline an inconvenient process or remove silly hassles you help the highly-motivated staff members disproportionately more than the others: since they are so much more productive they run into the problem more often, and they tolerate inefficiencies less patiently than others.
- **Give them exposure.** Highly-motivated employees have dreams (not that the others do not dream, but the dreams of the highly motivated are especially vivid.) Find out what they are and help them achieve them. If could be an opportunity to attend an industry conference, having lunch with your boss, the chance to attend a training class. The rewards to the organization of a satisfied, highly motivated individual typically dwarf the cost of getting that exposure. Make sure you're giving the right type of exposure: the individual looking for Linux kernel training will be dismayed to be sitting across from the CEO with a white tablecloth between them...
- **Avoid over-use.** We tend to reach for the highly motivated people to do everything: difficult customer calls; interviews; training new

hires; writing knowledge base articles. The reality is that highly-motivated people do burn out too, so make sure you are not abusing their willingness to lend a hand.

Don't forget the less Motivated Employees

Even a great hiring program will not produce only stars: there are many things you can do to nudge the less motivated crowd to decent performance (and they work for highly-motivated employees too!)

- **Explain the big picture.** Why is meeting response time important? Who are the key customers that need kid-glove treatment? It's much easier to be a good stonecutter if you know you're building a cathedral.
- **Define meaningful individual objectives and enforce them.** Building the cathedral is inspiring but day to day you should measure how many stones were cut and how well they were cut. Carefully balance quality with volume. And take action when someone's not meeting the goals. Working with slackers naturally leads to decreased performance all around.
- **Find ways to reward cooperation.** We know that teamwork is essential for delivering great service but we tend to manage strictly through individual objectives. This is silly. Include some team goals and rewards. (Maybe how many pillars were erected this month, along with individual stones cut.)
- **Be fair.** It's fine to give someone special treatment as long as there's a good reason for it. So if your star player gets to go to Linux training and others do not, it's probably fine, but allowing promotion criteria for Team A to be much more lenient than for Team B will create problems.
- **Treat people as individuals.** A common source of deep dissatisfaction on the job is the idea that we are all anonymous, interchangeable parts in the system. Show your human side and learn about each staff member as an individual: family members, hobbies, projects. Treat people with more than respect: with interest in their individual concerns. It's the decent thing to do, and it turns out to be the profitable thing to do, as motivated employees will go the extra mile for customers and for the organization.

About Francoise Tourniaire.....

Francoise Tourniaire is the founder and principal of FT Works, a consulting firm that helps technology companies create and grow their support operations. FT Works offers do-it-yourself tools and targeted assistance to create successful hiring, training, and performance management systems. For more information, visit www.ftworks.com or call 650 559 9826.

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