

Motivation: using a natural force



by Garland C. McWatters, Jr.

I believe motivation is a natural force and cannot be artificially created. It's like love and gravity. Think of the things you really enjoy doing. You get so much pleasure from them that you can't wait to do them again. No one has to pay you or threaten you to do them. It's called positive reinforcement because the action reinforces itself. It's the most powerful form of motivation: it's internal and personal.

Natural motivation sets off a flow of "happy juices" in the body. These chemicals give us a sense of euphoria and well being. They heal and comfort. On the other hand, coercion, mistakenly thought of as motivation, does the opposite. It is fear-based and causes stress and anxiety, triggering stress hormones to be released that can lead to disease.

It's been my experience that employees at all levels really do want to come to work and do a good job and to feel that, at the end of the day, they did something of value and were fairly compensated for it. All we managers have to do is figure out how not to get in the way.

I heard management guru Tom Peters say years ago in a seminar how some managers take highly motivated, competent workers who volunteer their own time to add tremendous creative value to their communities and bring them into their companies and "manage them into incompetence." Wow! His message resonated with me: managers somehow block the natural flow of motivation by instituting energy zapping practices, even when they intend to do the opposite.

I once got a call from a senior manager who asked if I presented motivational programs. I replied that what I do; whereupon, he said his company would like me to come over and motivate their employees to give heart and soul to the company. My reply probably cost me that contract. I said, "your employees already want to give their heart and soul to their work. What is management doing to discourage it?" He hung up and didn't call back.

When workers in all kinds of jobs describe what motivates them, they mention things like feeling valued and appreciated, doing important work, being challenged and meeting the challenge. They want to have fun, use their strengths to learn and apply new knowledge and have opportunities to develop their leadership abilities.

When they list the de-motivators, they mention unclear expectations, being taken for granted, being set up to fail or to do poor quality and poorly designed work. Being micro-managed is as bad to them as being neglected and never checked on. They are put off by internal politics, internal competition that divides efforts, dishonesty and hypocrisy. They also don't like managers tolerating poor performance in others.

Money comes up as a motivator when it represents paying for life necessities. Workers at the bottom of the wage scale will jump ship for a few dollars more. However, when the necessities are paid for, workers talk about money in an interesting way. They might say, "they can't pay me enough to put up with all the crap around this place!" So, we decide to pay them more, but it's not the money. It's the crap. Get rid of the crap and the money is fine.

If we are going to have motivational workplaces, we have to concentrate on creating environments where the natural energy of motivation is allowed to work for us. Those are places where workers do well designed, properly supported work, where expectations are clear and attainable and where workers are appreciated and valued for their good work. And that's something within the control of any manager at any level.

What turns you on?