

How Do I Motivate People?

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How Do I Motivate People?

In over two decades of helping people work with people, the number one question asked is “*How do I motivate people?*” To be certain that we’re on the same page, let’s define motivation as — creating a psychological condition that arouses an individual to achieve a desired goal.

Let’s approach the answer to this question historically. There are many theories of motivation, but we will highlight a couple of classics and we promise not to write a history book.

Theory X vs. Theory Y

Motivating people has probably been an issue since humans populated this earth and created organizational life. Leaders emerged and their authority allowed them to direct and control. Douglas McGregor labeled this leadership style Theory X. McGregor proposed that management practices stem from the manager’s perception of the basic nature of people.

Theory X

1. The average person is lazy and hates to work.
2. People have little desire to be responsible or self-directed. They want to be told what to do.
3. People are not interested in using their creativity to solve organizational problems.
4. People are simply interested in fulfilling their basic security needs.
5. There is a conflict between the company’s objectives for peak performance and the lazy employee.

According to McGregor, Theory Y is at the opposite end of the leadership continuum. The classic Harwood Study highlights Theory Y thinking. Low employee morale and performance were sabotaging the success to implement change within a manufacturing facility. These leaders were “directing” an effort to “control” their people (i.e., Theory X). The employees reacted with a performance slowdown.

Consultants examined the situation and eventually suggested a novel idea — ask the employees to solve the production problems. Guess what? Production exceeded expectations. Participatory leadership or Theory Y was born.

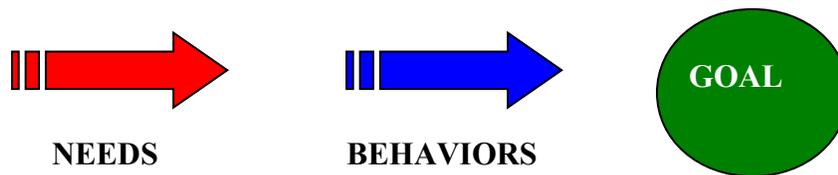
Theory Y

1. Work is as natural as is play or rest.
2. People like to take control of their destiny.
3. People like to be part of an entity that is larger than self.
4. People seek responsibility as a function of living.
5. People have the capacity to exercise a high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity to solve organizational issues.

Research has documented the overwhelming success of the Theory Y leadership style in terms of creating a more engaging workforce, improving production and profits, while attracting and retaining talent. But, research also shows that the majority of leaders continue to rely on the antiquated behaviors of Theory X. Not good!

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Our answer to motivating people would not be complete without mentioning Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's basic tenant is that an unsatisfied need creates a tension state that drives particular goal-seeking behaviors.



Maslow's hierarchy stipulated that:

1. Fulfilling our **basic** needs of food, water, etc. is the first level. Upon fulfilling these needs, we can move to the next step in the hierarchy.
2. The second level consists of feeling **safe**, e.g., salary, benefits, having a residence.

3. Having satisfied the first two levels, we have the need to **belong** to groups, e.g., family, religious, sport teams, and civic clubs.
4. Once belonging to groups is satisfied we strive to satisfy **ego** needs. The car we drive, our profession, the titles within an organization, or where we live, may meet this need.
5. The highest source of motivation is **self-actualization** or proving ourselves to ourselves. We want to maximize our potential.

Obviously, the basic needs and feeling safe are important to fulfill. Fulfilling basic needs, though, is not the motivational source that will encourage us to step out of our comfort zone to be peak performers. Of these, money is perhaps the most controversial issue, as some people believe that it is a **PRIMARY** source of motivation. Money is *typically* more of a source of “dissatisfaction” than a “satisfaction”. In other words, displeasure or agitation is generated by believing we’re not fairly compensated. Such dissension interferes with achieving peak performance. On the other hand, believing that we’re fairly (or overly) compensated does not necessarily increase performance. Several years ago, research showed the positive impact of a salary increase upon performance lasted seven days. Do you think it’s realistic to expect a salary increase every seven days? So you see it is a fruitless effort to throw money at people and hope they become peak performers.

With that said, money will help buy “things” to satisfy ego needs, luxury homes, cars, etc. You get the picture. Ego needs are a higher-order motivational source and can positively impact performance.

The most powerful motivational source is self-actualization. Maslow hypothesized that we’re not fully capable of reaching this state until we’re in our 60’s. Today we know that (1) completing meaningful and challenging responsibilities, and (2) being able to do what we do best every day are extremely important motivational sources. The authors have completed research in a variety of workplace settings, (e.g., military, manufacturing, and the service sector), and the positive impact of challenging and meaningful work transcends across industries and age groups. Keep reading and you’ll learn why.

Intrinsic/Extrinsic

The preceding two motivational models lead us to consider the impact of extrinsic vs. intrinsic source of motivation. Extrinsic is something that is external or that which we receive. Think of intrinsic as being within.

In the workplace, extrinsic motivators include such things as recognition for a job well done, threat of job security, or punishment. Threatening with job security or punishing employees fit into the Theory X model. Yes, the use of such tactics may produce a blip on the motivational radar screen, but are not effective in the long run. Remember, it is

easier to pull a rope than it is to push it. External threats and punishment are forms of pushing.

Theory Y is the good feeling associated with doing a job well. It's the enjoyment of being creative when faced with challenges, contributing to the problem-solving process, and being empowered to do what you do best every day. In essence, Theory Y is being able to maximize the use of your knowledge and specialized skill sets.

As you might expect, extrinsic rewards can lead to intrinsic fulfillment. The obvious example is feeling good upon receiving recognition for a job well done. It should go without saying, that all of us need to know if our performance meets/exceeds expectations. Plus, it just feels good (intrinsic) to know that others recognize our contributions.

Robert Ryan and Edward Deci examined the impact of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in an *American Psychologist* (2000) article. These authors concluded that intrinsic motivation stimulates peak performance more so than extrinsic. These authors identified autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the specific intrinsic variables that fuel peak performance. Their definition of these three variables is as follows:

1. **Autonomy:** the degree people feel their behavior is self-determined. That is, the person is in control of their destiny.
2. **Competence:** the degree people feel proficient at completing their job responsibilities. Challenging, meaningful work, and receiving recognition for job performance contribute to feeling competent.
3. **Relatedness:** the degree people feel secure. Being a part of something greater than self and feeling valued by significant others to whom people want to feel attached contributes to relatedness. This variable speaks directly to the relationship with a supervisor.

More recently, Daniel Pink (2009) wrote *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. This author offers the same conclusion about the power of intrinsic motivation and the impact of the three intrinsic variables identified by Ryan and Deci.

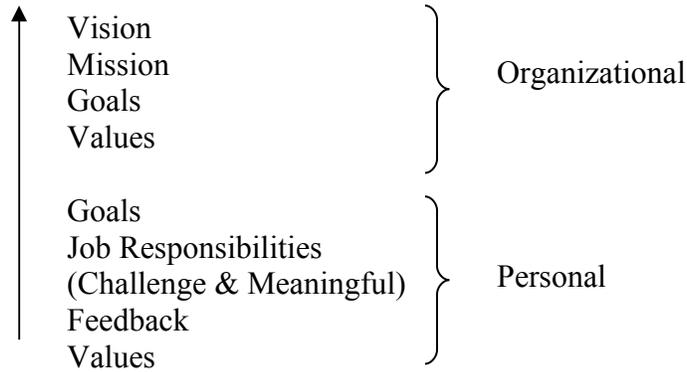
Motivating Others

Now we're ready to address the question, "*Can I motivate people?*" Yes, you can motivate yourself, and decide to use the behaviors that will encourage others to be motivated. *Like you, other people must decide their level of motivation.*

That reality, though, does not render you a victim. You can create a psychological environment so that your employees will decide to be motivated through engagement and inspirational leadership. By the way, companies (e.g., Proctor and Gamble and American Express) are now offering development courses on being an inspirational leader.

To begin with, world-class organizations that enjoy an engaged, motivated workforce align the following components:

Organizational Alignment



That is, employees know the direction of the company’s future and the purpose it serves. The employees’ values support those of the organization and their challenging, meaningful job responsibilities lead to achieving personal and organizational goals. Employees also receive the necessary feedback to know how their day-to-day job responsibilities assist in achieving their work unit and organizational goals. The alignment of these elements creates a synergistic force.

Leadership

“You get the best efforts from others not by lighting a fire beneath them, but by building a fire within.”
- Bob Nelson

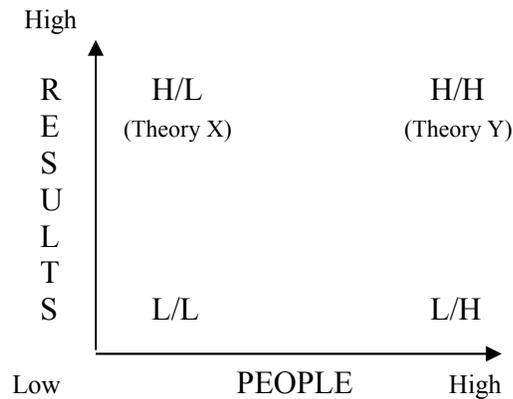
How “people work with people” is the primary contributor to an employees’ decision to be motivated. Specifically, research shows that supervisor interpersonal performance helps employees decide to be motivated to either **LEAVE** the organization or be a **HIGH** performer.

If you are serious about answering the question, “What can I do to motivate employees?” you must (1) obtain honest feedback to examine how you are currently treating people, and (2) engage in a change/accountability process to use **the interpersonal behaviors** to encourage your people to be an engaged, motivated workforce. If you’re not willing to do these, then toss this article.

The following figure depicts combinations of leadership styles when combining the two variables of obtaining results and engaging people. You can quickly see that the

High/Low (H/L) combination of results/people represents Theory X while Theory Y is the High/High (H/H) combination.

Leadership Styles



As a side bar, assessments are available to identify your leadership style and the style that others perceive you use. (Contact us to learn more.)

The remainder of this article focuses on the use of leadership and interpersonal behaviors that encourages employees **TO DECIDE** to be synergistic peak performers. The basis for these recommended leadership behaviors include our twenty plus years of helping people work with people combined with the work of Jim Collins Level 5 Leader, Gallup Q12, Transformational Leadership, Models for Management, Ryan and Deci (2000), *Drive* (Pink 2009), and *Employee Engagement* (Macy et. al, 2009). As you read the list of leadership values and behaviors, note these behaviors are already available within your interpersonal repertoire. The primary challenge is to use these behaviors consistently.

ENGAGEMENT

Communication

1. Keep employees informed with necessary, factual information.
2. Admit mistakes.
3. Admit not having necessary information.
4. Create an environment in which people feel free to state their opinions without fear of retaliation.

Continuous Learning

1. Seek feedback (i.e., the brutal truth) to improve your performance.
2. Use feedback to improve your performance.
3. Provide honest feedback to improve performance.
4. Provide employees learning opportunities through challenging assignments.
5. Use mistakes as learning opportunities.
6. Participate in learning activities.

Empower

1. Provide the opportunity for employees to do what they do best.
2. Provide employees the opportunity to participate in challenging and meaningful work.
3. Provide employees the opportunity to participate in defining the desired results.
4. Delegate the authority to make independent decisions toward achieving the desired results.
5. Provide the freedom to take action without fear of retribution.

Fairness

1. Apply policies and procedures consistently.
2. Award recognition equally.
3. Treat each employee as an equal contributor to the team's success.
4. Use the interpersonal skills to maximize working relationships with all employees.
5. Hold employees accountable to the same standard.

Integrity

1. Do what is right because it is right.
2. Go beyond self-interests for the good of the group.
3. Exhibit a fierce resolve to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great.
4. Openly discuss strengths and weaknesses.

Positive

1. Recognize employees for doing a good job.
2. Approach tasks with a "can do" attitude.
3. Talk optimistically about achieving the future.
4. Talk about the company's compelling vision.
5. Encourage employees to challenge the status quo.
6. Readily give credit for the team's successes while accepting the responsibility for the "mistakes/failures".

Respect

1. Care about each employee as a person.
2. Treat each employee as an individual rather than just another member of the group.
3. Seek employee input to examine different perspectives when addressing issues.
4. Listen with an open mind regardless of the intensity of the discussion.
5. Use employee's input whenever possible.

Teamwork

1. Ensure that employees know what needs done to be successful.
2. Proactively do whatever is necessary to get the job done.
3. Seek feedback to improve teamwork.
4. Use feedback to improve teamwork.
5. Hold employees accountable to achieve the desired results.

Trust

1. Be dependable and do what is expected.
2. Keep confidential information confidential.
3. Competently complete job responsibilities.

Listing the behaviors is the easy part. The challenge is putting these behaviors to work on a daily basis to institutionalize them into your culture. We are proponents to use systems to drive behavior change. We've seen too many training dollars wasted without an accountability system to ensure a transfer of training. Let us warn you that you are about to read a "mini-advertisement". Log onto www.teammax.net to take the Readiness for Change Assessment and learn your stage of change in terms of using interpersonal skills in a teamwork environment. Click onto the Staying on Track presentation to learn about the TeamMax® methodology. We use real-time data to improve interpersonal performance as is done to improve technical performance. Using data is an accountability tool to ensure people use the desired behaviors while completing job responsibilities.

In conclusion, you now have the basic ingredients to create an engaged, motivated workforce. Let's return to the question. *"What can I do to motivate employees?"* Gandhi stated, *"Be the change you wish to see in this world"*. That means you may need to change your behavior before expecting your employees to do the same. You must answer the question, *"Am I going to exhibit the necessary motivation to do whatever is required to create an engaged, motivated workforce?"* Only you can answer that question.

Appendix A

Gallup Q12

The Q12 questions are published in many sources (to learn more Google Q12), and we're including them just in case you have not seen them.

1. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
2. Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right?
3. At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
7. At work, do your opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?
9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
10. Do you have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
12. In the last year, have you had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

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Appendix B

References & Resources

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Macy, William H., Schneider, Benjamin, Barbara, Karen M., & Young, Scott A. [Employee Engagement: Tools for Analysis, Practice, and Competitive Advantage](#) by Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Pink, Daniel H. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. Riverhead Books, 2009

Ryan, Richard M., and Deci, Edward L. *Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being*. American Psychologist, January 200. pps. 68 – 78.

Transformational Leadership available from www.mindgarden.com

The Q12 survey is available from The Gallup Organization.

Additional Resources

Cole, Larry, Baggett, Byrd, and Cole, Michael. *True Growth Leadership Series*. Log onto www.teammax.net to learn more about this eBook series.

Herzberg, Fredrick. *One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?* Harvard Business Review. January 2003

Gostic, Adrian and Elton, Chester. [Carrot Principle: How the Best Managers Use Recognition to Engage Their People, Retain Talent, and Accelerate Performance](#). 2009

Lawrence, Paul, and Nohria, Nitin. *Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices*. Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Log onto www.teammax.net and complete the Readiness for Change survey to learn about using interpersonal skills in a teamwork environment. This website also offers free articles on leadership topics and newsletters.

Models for Management available from www.teleometrics.com

Contact Information

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Larry is the founder of TeamMax®, a consulting firm that specializes in *helping people work with people*. He developed the TeamMax® “real-time” measurement methodologies to improve interpersonal effectiveness and improve teamwork efficiency that drives the company’s financial success. The TeamMax® methodologies systemically drive behavior change and measure the behaviors that were once thought to be too subjective to measure.

Since 1989, he has consulted to a variety of organizations, written articles and books, and has spoken to audiences about maximizing interpersonal performance.

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Michael is currently an Assistant Professor of Management at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Previously, he served as a Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer in the Institute for Leadership and Human Resource Management at the University of St. Gallen, in Switzerland. He is an award winning researcher and teacher.

He specializes in helping organizational leaders to appreciate how organizational contextual factors and work environments influence employees’ attachments to their organization. He gauges organizational energy levels and assists organizational leaders to make use of available levers to harness and maintain energy levels over time.

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