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Motivating Your Employees

The ability to motivate employees is often the difference between extraordinary and mediocre leadership. This guide provides a useful tool for understanding and motivating employees.

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Leaders who are able to motivate their workers will have a better chance of reducing the typical labor problems faced in today's economy (turnover, absenteeism and low productivity). In the past, when the state's economy was weaker than it is today, agricultural leaders didn't have to worry about these labor issues because there were plenty of workers to choose from. Because of the expansion of agricultural enterprises and Nebraska's exceptionally low unemployment rate, finding, keeping and motivating excellent agricultural workers has become a major leadership issue for employers.

The most common roadblock leaders face when motivating employees is a tendency to assume that all are motivated by the same thing. Researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln examined leader and employee motivation trends throughout the agricultural workforce. This research found that people are motivated in a variety of ways. The five sources of motivation include:

- intrinsic process — motivated by fun
- instrumental — motivated by rewards
- self-concept external — motivated by reputation
- self-concept internal — motivated by challenge
- goal internalized — motivated by the cause

It is important as you read about these sources of motivation to understand that each exists in various proportions in each of us, but in varying degrees. No person is motivated exclusively by just one source of motivation.

The Five Ways That People are Motivated

Intrinsic process (fun) motivation is characterized by task pleasure and sheer enjoyment of the work.

Behavior that suggests an employee is motivated by *intrinsic process* includes:

- being easily taken off tasks when one doesn't enjoy the tasks assigned
- talking about how much one likes or dislikes the tasks assigned
- volunteering freely for the activities that one enjoys most
- not being very good at a job, if one doesn't enjoy doing it

Instrumental (\$\$\$) motivation is characterized by a concern for tangible incentives (e.g. pay, bonus, or leave allowances). Behavior that suggests an employee is *instrumentally* motivated includes:

- asking "What's in it for me?"
- expecting compensation for any and all extra work performed
- talking about how much money one makes or should make
- frequently talking about the relative wealth of others

Self-concept external (reputation) motivation is characterized by a concern for others' opinions. An employee motivated this way is very interested in preserving and enhancing his or her reputation among peers and supervisors. Behavior that suggests an employee is motivated by *self-concept external* includes:

- frequently ask for feedback
- seeking praise and recognition for work performed
- bragging or telling stories about accomplishments
- being attentive to who gets the credit when work is finished

Self-concept internal (achievement) motivation is characterized by a concern for meeting one's personal standards of job performance. An employee motivated this way is not concerned with feedback and tends to be self-driven. Behavior that suggests an employee is motivated by *self-concept-internal* includes:

- seeking to perform the most difficult tasks at work
- working best when one's skills are needed for the tasks
- being interested in developing one's range of skills
- performing the most important tasks with little supervision or direction

Goal internalization (principles) motivation is characterized by a need to believe in the cause at work. An employee motivated this way uses value-based principles to guide decisions and actions. Behavior that suggests an employee is motivated by *goal internalization* includes:

- asking about the purpose of tasks ("Why are we doing this?")
- commenting on the strategic focus of the operation
- working hard when one believes in the cause and not at all if one doesn't
- living a professional life guided by a strict set of principles and values

How to Motivate Your Workers

Each of these five sources of motivation exists in all people but in varying degrees. The key to motivating others is being able to tap into the right sources of motivation for each worker. In this section are tips for motivating each source.

(Fun) Intrinsic Process

- Stress the fun at work
- Find out which tasks an employee likes best and assign those tasks to the employee
- Let employees have their fun in the workplace
- Create an enjoyable work atmosphere (laugh, have fun)

(\$\$\$) Instrumental Motivation

- Make expectations clear to employees
- Let workers know what compensation they will get for their efforts
- Create incentive-laden pay scales
- Make all bonuses and incentives contingent on performance outcomes
- Develop nonmonetary rewards for employees to pursue (extra days off, leave early, etc.)

(Reputation) Self-Concept External

- Give public praise and recognition for employee achievements
- Criticize employees behind closed doors (never in public)
- Assign projects that are highly visible
- Articulate the operation's prestigious reputation in the community to your workers

(Achievement) Self-Concept Internal

- Give challenging work that requires worker's expertise
- Create opportunities for workers to further develop their skills
- Emphasize the importance of worker's skills towards the success of the operation
- Avoid assigning menial or mundane tasks to these individuals

(Principles) Goal Internalization

- Communicate the organization's vision
- Communicate desirable end-goals
- Articulate optimism for reaching these goals
- Communicate how tasks being performed help to achieve these goals

Sources

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