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John E. Barbuto, Jr.

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jbarbutojr1@unl.edu

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G01-1440-A

77 Ways To Motivate Your Workers

John E. Barbuto, Jr., Leadership Development Extension Specialist

This NebGuide explains the different ways people are motivated and suggests strategies leaders can use to get the best performance from their people.

No longer can leaders hire workers and expect to get motivated individuals. Learning how to motivate is now one of the most relevant and essential skills leaders can possess in today's ever-changing workplace. This guide provides some insights into human motivation by offering 77 practical suggestions for motivating workers.

Before the 1980s, good leadership was usually synonymous with assertive decision-making. Leaders were celebrated for their courage and risk-taking when shaping corporate strategies. Those times have changed. Today, leaders must go beyond the day-to-day operations and "tough decisions." Leaders in today's society are expected to be social scientists, and the great leaders of today and tomorrow are those gifted individuals who have mastered the art of motivation. The ability to understand people and to be able to tap into their respective motives are the skills that make the difference in today's society.

What about making good decisions and tough choices? These are still central to what leaders must do, but today the leader's job doesn't stop there. Once the decisions have been made, today's leaders must be able to motivate their workers to accept and embrace organizational decisions.

What separates exceptional leaders from ordinary leaders is the ability to inspire and motivate employees. In recent studies, researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln examined sources of motivation of Nebraska workers in urban and rural settings. The results have demonstrated that five unique sources of motivation exist:

- Intrinsic process — motivated by FUN
- Instrumental — motivated by REWARDS
- Self-Concept-External — motivated by REPUTATION
- Self-Concept-Internal — motivated by CHALLENGE
- Goal Internalization — motivated by the cause or

PURPOSE

Each of the five sources requires different organizational and leadership characteristics to tap into them. Exceptional leaders will find ways to tap into each source. Those who tap into just one or two will motivate only a small percentage of their workers and be less effective. However, leaders who understand the different ways that individuals are motivated will be able to effectively motivate their workers.

Motivating Workers

This section includes a list of 77 ways to motivate workers by tapping into each of the five sources of motivation: FUN, REWARDS, REPUTATION, CHALLENGE, and PURPOSE.

FUN

There are some workers that really want to enjoy the work they do. Many who enjoy the activities they participate in at work look forward to the day each morning. The opposite also can be true when workers don't enjoy the tasks they perform at work, but they may like their social activities after work (golf, softball leagues, shows, movies, going out with friends, community events). These are the individuals that get excited at the end of the day — knowing that the fun can now begin. Leaders should take notice of these signs. If your workers are more excited at the end of the day (to leave) than they are at the beginning of the day (to arrive), then there is probably a lack of motivation taking place in the area of intrinsic process — or FUN.

Here are some things leaders can do to make the workplace and the experience of working more enjoyable:

1. Find out which tasks are each of your employee's favorites.
2. Find ways to assign more of the tasks they enjoy and fewer of the ones they don't like to do.
3. If you are a good joke teller, tell lots of them.

4. If you aren't much of a joke teller, buy a joke book and learn one joke a day to tell to your workers (keep them appropriate for your work setting).
5. Many people love to laugh on the job — a happy worker is a good worker — so let there be laughter in the workplace.
6. If you know of a worker with a great sense of humor, ask them every day if they've heard any good jokes lately.
7. Do something interesting with the lunchroom or breakroom to give it more personality.
8. Create a quote of the week board for people that have said the funniest things on the job.
9. Create a social calendar or events board so employees can link up for activities after work.
10. Make laughter a priority when interacting with your employees.
11. Plan social events for your employees.
12. Organize a company ball (softball, baseball, basketball, volleyball, football) game.
13. Sponsor a company barbecue.
14. Take your employees out to dinner or invite them to your house for dinner.
15. Organize a company golf outing.
16. Schedule important meetings off-site at out-of-the-ordinary locations.
17. Always start a meeting with something social or fun before you get down to business.
18. Make sure that every meeting has some scheduled fun time.
19. Have company-wide events that are intended to let everyone have fun.
20. Take your employees to a state tournament game in the community.

REWARDS

Many workers need to know their work will be rewarded to be motivated to perform. Many leaders read this statement and will say, "Hey, I'm paying this person X per hour to do this job, so that should be enough." This may be somewhat true, you may be paying this person X amount of money to perform the job. But for a person motivated in this way, this is expected. This is the bare minimum. No frills. Per hour pay is what keeps people coming to work, but this isn't what will motivate them to excel in their work. People motivated by rewards will look beyond whether they are getting something tangible for their work. They will also consider what others are getting for their work and often will compare their output with others. For example, if a worker notices that he or she consistently outperforms coworkers, but knows that that coworkers earn a higher salary, this will not sit well with a person motivated by rewards. In fact, it will make a worker

want to work less hard if colleagues earn more without being more productive. The opposite also works against motivating an instrumentally motivated worker. If a worker earns more than a colleague, but is less productive than the other worker, this won't cause this person to work harder. It will not cause this person to change their effort level at all. The reason for this is that if a worker motivated by REWARDS doesn't think that his or her pay really depends on how well they perform, then they won't be motivated to work harder. Extra effort and hard work only will come from these individuals when it is clearly rewarded and when it will affect their REWARDS. Here are 20 ways to motivate a person motivated by REWARDS.

1. Create incentive-laden pay scales (less output = less pay, more output = more pay).
2. Create a sales contest (if applicable) with several prizes to go to the top performers.
3. Create clear work objectives and goals for workers to pursue in order to earn salary increments (no performance = no raise).
4. If workers know they must perform to achieve good salary increases, this will motivate them to work hard.
5. Remind workers of what they will get for their efforts.
6. Avoid across-the-board raises (this sends the message that it doesn't matter whether you work hard or not).
7. Create incentives attached to predetermined objectives and tasks.
8. Offer to pay part or all of country or health club membership dues for the outstanding performer of the year.
9. Create a generous bonus structure with a benchmark that may seem unreachable, then watch them reach it.
10. Give special rewards to top performers on a regular basis.
11. Remind workers that performance evaluations are just around the corner (if they are) and that what you are asking them to do will affect their review.
12. Make clear expectations of what you expect from your workers and hold them to it when it comes time to putting your "money where your mouth is."
13. If workers don't perform to expectations, hold them accountable by giving them no raise, no bonus, or no promotion.
14. Offer extra holiday time for outstanding performers (make sure that workers know about the incentive well in advance).
15. Develop perks or prizes for individuals that can perform the best in a functional area for a given week (make sure you give the prize to the worker that performed best).

16. Don't pass out rewards evenly to all employees in an effort to include everyone. This demotivates the instrumentally motivated person.
17. Be fair! These workers will watch closely to see what the consequences are of everyone's actions.
18. Follow through on all of your promises.
19. Make sure that workers do not receive perks if they haven't earned them.
20. Remind workers which tasks will be most important for their performance evaluations.

REPUTATION

People motivated by reputation have a strong need to enhance their image or esteem with others. There are a lot of people out there who want others to think highly of them. Many people are just plain hungry, starving in fact, for some attention and accolades. Individuals striving for popularity or fame characterize the self-concept—external motivation. Many workers will not work hard unless they believe their efforts will be noticed and recognized. Workers often say things like, "My boss doesn't really care what I do or how I do it." Other workers will work hard for a short while until they realize that their boss doesn't verbalize any appreciation for their efforts. When this happens, motivation disappears. People motivated by this source will go to great lengths to save face in the public eye. These are the individuals who take great pride in their appearance, in the clothes they wear, the cars they drive, the neighborhood they live, and other outward things. These people are seeking approval from others. Here are eighteen ways to motivate persons who are motivated by their REPUTATION.

1. Give workers lots of feedback about the way they are performing.
2. Give praise in front of other people (the more people that know they did well the better!).
3. Criticize these individuals only in private (never in front of others).
4. Give unsolicited compliments and positive reinforcement to workers for jobs with which you are satisfied.
5. Tell your workers that you appreciate the work they do.
6. Start a suggestion box and publish the best suggestion made each week on the company bulletin board (make sure everyone knows that the best suggestions will be published).
7. Tell people they are important both to the business and to you.
8. Ask workers if anything interesting happened to them this weekend (they love to share their stories).
9. Make sure that you give credit to everyone that contributes (never leave people out when they make an impact).

10. Give out certificates of appreciation to anyone who does extraordinarily well for the company.
11. Recognize the outstanding performers in the group at every staff meeting.
12. Consider starting an employee recognition system (employee of the month, department employee of the month).
13. Create plaques and awards for top sales people, staff, producers, etc.
14. Put up an achievement board in the lunchroom to highlight some of the great things that have happened in the company and who was responsible!
15. Put up pictures and biographies of all your employees in a central place.
16. Sponsor an awards ceremony to recognize all of the award winners.
17. Include unique pieces of information about each employee and change these items from week to week (example: favorite ice cream flavor, worst day ever, thing that I'm most proud of, etc.).
18. At companywide meetings, create and announce serious and fun "superlatives" (example: hardest worker, cleanest car, spiffiest dressed, most versatile, cleanest shoes, most athletic, most reliable).

CHALLENGE

Research shows that most leaders in this state and in the nation seem to have extraordinary levels of self-concept—internal. This means that leaders tend to be motivated from within and like to challenge themselves with new skills and developmental opportunities. Some leaders think that this is the only way that people are motivated. Many leaders believe if people aren't motivated in this way, then they are simply not motivated. This is a classic example that highlights the fact that motivation is not one-size-fits-all. Leaders must be aware that not all people are motivated in the same way or by the same things. In Nebraska, this source of motivation is the predominant but not the exclusive way to motivate. This does not mean that leaders can ignore the other four sources of motivation. Researchers at the University of Nebraska have not found a single individual in the state or country that is motivated solely by any ONE source of motivation. Even though self-concept—internal is highest (on average) in Nebraska, the other four sources of motivation are just as important to learn and to develop ways to tap.

Here are 10 ways to motivate a person motivated by CHALLENGE.

1. Stay out of their way and let them do the work if they know how to do it.
2. Assign tasks that require their skills and talents.
3. Find out what they think is their best skill and encourage them to use this with the tasks you assign.
4. Find out what area this person wants to most improve in and find ways for them to work on this skill.

5. Find ways to help them to continually develop their abilities.
6. Avoid assigning mundane tasks to these workers.
7. Play devil's advocate and challenge them by saying, "I'm not sure if you are up to this challenge, but..."
8. Give them a challenge, then get out of their way.
9. Give them autonomy to structure and perform their job as they see best.
10. Don't insult them by asking them to do something that just about anybody could do (they need to know that they are uniquely qualified to do it).

PURPOSE

Individuals who are motivated by purpose look beyond themselves. They really aren't concerned with their own self-interests or with who may notice what they've done or whether they are being pushed and challenged. What matters to a person motivated by a strong sense of purpose is that they must believe in what the organization is doing. If they agree with what the company stands for and what the company is trying to do, then they will join in and give their fullest efforts to achieve the organization goals. However, if these individuals don't feel called by the vision or PURPOSE, they will seem rather lethargic or uninterested in what's going on. Instead their best efforts will be reserved for other causes in their lives more deserving (to them) of their heart and soul effort. These are the individuals that commonly will work very hard on community-based problems or charity drives. These individuals are often times found volunteering for Red Cross or the United Way, trying to make a positive impact for society as a whole. If you're a boss and notice that some of your average or below average workers are exceptional at charity drives or much more enthusiastic about their volunteer and service projects than their day job, this may indicate that the person is motivated by goal internalization (purpose).

Nine ways to motivate a person high in purpose or goal internalization are listed below.

1. Communicate the purpose of tasks that are being assigned.
2. Make sure the company has a vision and mission that it is pursuing.
3. Communicate the organization's vision and purpose on a daily basis.
4. Refer to the purpose of the organization and "why we exist" when outlining strategies and goals.
5. Remind employees who depends on this organiza-

- tion to succeed (families, communities, industry, producers).
6. Discuss why (in terms of contributing to the mission) things need to occur.
7. Remind workers how their efforts make a difference for the company in its pursuit of its vision.
8. Make links between their work and the company vision so that they can see how they fit into the bigger picture.
9. Include workers in the visioning and strategic planning process so that they feel they have a stake in the organizational outcomes.

If you can find ways to tap all five sources of motivation described in this publication, you will tap into everyone's motivation and you also will have the most productive, energetic, and upbeat organization that you could ever imagine. Research has shown that leaders capable of tapping the five motives experience less turnover, less absenteeism, higher productivity, and higher profits in their organizations. In today's society, it's not just the decisions and strategies of leaders that matter, it's also their ability to motivate their employees. Find a great motivator and you've found a great leader.

For more information about worker motivation, contact J. Barbuto or your local Cooperative Extension educator to learn about more resources available to you through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Sources*

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*Thanks to Dick Fleming, Jeanette Friezen, Janet Fox, Susan Fritz, Levene Barrett, Arlen Etling, and Dan Wheeler for their thoughtful comments and suggestions for this Neb-Guide.

**File under: CONSUMER EDUCATION
D-31, Consumer Information—General**

Issued October 2001, 3,000