

## How to motivate staff for exceptional performance

Ensuring staff can operate the way you *wish* may not be easy. Ensuring they *want* to can be downright difficult. Motivation can make all the difference.

Let's be clear. When people are well motivated, their productivity, efficiency, concentration, even creativity, rises. The reverse is also true. If people are upset, albeit sometimes only in minor ways – about their work and work environment – then their effectiveness declines. Then time and energy spent on other things (say, rumourmongering or playing games on the firm's computers) increases.



### **No magic formula**

There is no simple panacea guaranteed to motivate. Not even money. After all, would anyone say they would *not* like to earn more? Many things affect motivation. These include:

- The culture of the work environment;
- The interest the work provides;
- People (managers and colleagues);
- A sense of achievement.

Similarly, many things can adversely affect it. One minor thing can eclipse all else. For example, one manager found that disgruntlement with a job title was at the root of one staff member's declining efficiency. This was not because the title – Account Executive – was truly inappropriate, but because their partner had a title that ended with the word 'Manager'. This shows clearly how intangible things – in this case status – can affect motivation.

### **Making it happen**

To motivate and maintain motivation successfully demands that:

- The need to motivate pervades all management thinking and action;
- The motivational impact of every action is considered;
- The influence exerted to create positive motivation (and counteract negative influences) is continuous;
- Sufficient time is given to the process.

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Motivation is a balance. Factors that enhance good feeling must be actively maximised. Those that negate it must be minimised. Motivation does not just happen. However, with the right philosophy, you can boost performance strikingly. So time spent on thinking it through is well worth it.

### ***Maximising motivational impact***

#### **The situation**

Let me give you an example of how motivation works. In a medium-sized chain of travel agents, sales were lagging behind targets, despite good market conditions.

#### **The reaction**

The marketing manager took what he thought was appropriate action. Memos and emails flew around their offices. Key figures were highlighted. The results of failure were catalogued. Signs were posted on noticeboards.

#### **The result**

Sales remained static and morale dropped like a stone.

Staff felt even more demoralised about the organisation – and themselves. Management seemed to be suggesting that the situation was their fault. The figures, shortfalls of hundreds of thousands of pounds, bore no relation to sums in individual branches. Nor could the predominantly young staff members throughout the chain relate to them.

#### **The turn-around**

With a sales conference scheduled for all the staff, it was decided to try a different strategy. The large shortfall was amortised and presented as a series of smaller branch-related figures. These 'catch-up' figures were then related to what additional sales were necessary to hit targets. For example, each branch had to sell two additional typical holidays (Mum, Dad and 2.4 children) each week.

Similar figures were produced for other aspects of the business such as extra sales of flights.

Individual branch targets – and prizes – were agreed, and additional regular communications set up to chart progress and compare notes.

The result this time? Sales slowly climbed, and ultimately the annual target was hit.

### ***Relational motivation***

Why did the second method work better?

- It focused on the staff and dealt with things from *their* perspective;
- It approached the problem positively, rather than with doom and gloom;
- It made the problem seem manageable: setting out the action to be taken and making it appear possible;

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- It built in mechanisms to maintain focus on the issues and show how things were progressing, through on-going communication. It was not a one-off flash in the pan, quickly forgotten amidst the everyday pressures;
- It linked targets to the point where the sales action had to take place;
- It linked achieving targets to personal rewards.

The rewards were not, in fact, huge. But the sense of achievement was played on throughout the process.

### **Keep the influence working**

Variety makes motivation work best. You need to ring the changes and use the full panoply of inspirational methods. These range from the simple 'Good work' (a recognition of achievement which stimulates pride and thus combines two powerful motivational influences) to more complex schemes.

Thus quarterly incentive schemes may work better than an annual one. After all, managers are paid to worry about financial years, but for some staff deciding what to do on Friday week is long-term planning!

### **Learn hot buttons**

It is all a question of empathy. Motivation must work for, and be tailored to, particular staff. What you think appealing may not suit your staff. A Spring incentive scheme in one company failed because a manager realised too late that the prize at stake – garden furniture – made no sense to staff who mostly lived in flats.

Getting incentives right demands you are not censorious – for example, saying 'Surely they are not worried about *that!*' or letting your own views hold sway.

Motivation means leaving no stone unturned. It can work largely through the normal activity of the organisation. The temperature of an office is affected by many things – whether windows are closed or open, whether heating or air conditioning is on, the number of people in the room. Likewise, many things influence the motivational climate in a business, from administrative systems (which de-motivate if they

seem to make unnecessary work) to the choice of computer (laptops give staff flexibility about when and where they work).

Ultimately, motivation is influenced most by the style and practice adopted by individual managers towards their people – that is, how *you* behave.

However, one senior manager, when asked about the need for actively motivating staff and using a range of techniques, added a simple, overriding comment. 'Managers must care – really *care* – about their people. People can always spot genuine



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interest and concern, and whether time and effort is being taken to relate specifically and accurately to *them*. They like it, and they respond to it'.

Now, who amongst your team deserves an overdue 'Well done'?

### ***Motivational dos and don'ts***

- Make it easy for people to know what they are achieving (with clear objectives, targets and so on).
- Recognise a job well done in a variety of ways.
- Make the work itself as interesting and worthwhile as possible.
- Give people real personal responsibility and freedom of action.
- Allow, and encourage, progress within jobs (new tasks, new ways of working) so that jobs seem to change and expand.
- Recognise that ultimately peoples' ambition may take them beyond their current job, so providing opportunities for promotion is good in terms of long-term motivation.
- Adopt a motivational management style – be accessible, consult, and develop people. Be decisive and yet always fair.
- Communicate regularly and informatively. Be open and up-front.
- Don't be (unnecessarily) secretive.
- Watch the interaction between work and personal life (if home, family or social life is made seriously difficult in some way by pressure of work, motivation will always suffer).
- Get rid of unwieldy, old-fashioned, out-dated or nonsensical administrative practices and policies that can easily upset staff (and others).
- Avoid obtrusive supervision or appearing to lack trust.
- Prevent difficult work conditions hindering effectiveness and causing aggravation.
- Never assume salary – or money in any form – will magically motivate. On its own, money can do little, except perhaps in the short-term. On the other hand, good incentive schemes work better in the long-run and can be cheaper.
- Don't put up with friction in teams of people that must work well together. Try to identify and resolve disruptive issues quickly.
- Remember the intangible factors that matter to people – for example, status (job titles matter) or security (as provided by clear rules, guidelines and constructive appraisals).

### ***How the experts view motivation***

Julian Richer, founder and chairman of Richer Sounds, has adopted some highly effective management techniques.

He feels that good management is about achieving the right balance between control and motivation. 'Little control and lots of motivation equals anarchy; lots of control and no motivation means repression.'

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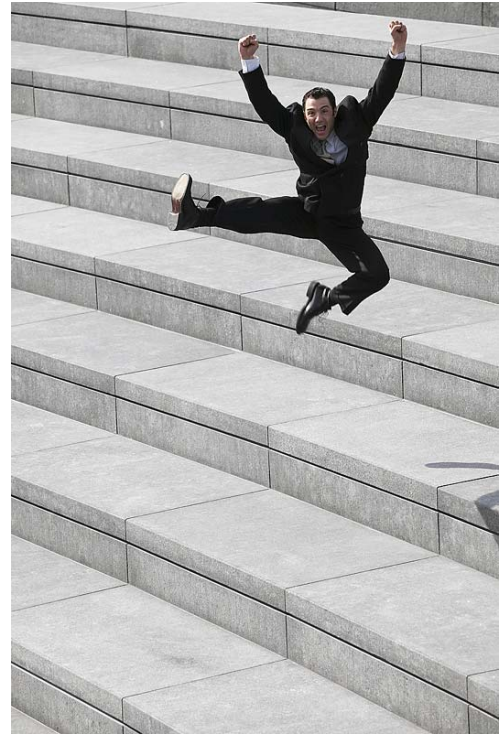
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He believes that the product is irrelevant. 'The key to success is how you treat employees so they are motivated, productive and in turn, treat your customers well. It's no good saying you can't afford to treat your staff better – you can't afford not to.'

**Richer's maxims:**

- Rewards. If you want your staff to give great service, reward them for it.
- Fun. On top of pay, provide extras that make the job enjoyable.
- Communication. You can't motivate if you don't communicate.
- Recognition. The best motivational technique is to say 'Well done and thank you'.
- Loyalty. If you want loyalty from your people, you must give it to them.

Ultimately, motivating people is about caring about them and finding ways to ensure that they get out of bed and come to work because they want to, not because they have to. ❖



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**Contact**

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