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Most management techniques include motivation methods and mechanisms, proselytized by training gurus and motivational speakers who tell us that in order to get the most out of our staffs, and ourselves, we need to develop “motivators.” I don’t agree. We have all the “self-motivation” we need to perform well.

What we need is an environment absent of de-motivators and - what we really are referencing when talking of management motivation - support mechanisms to allow self-motivation to flourish. The mechanisms that management uses merely serve as “connectors,” or re-enforcement, to those things that already motivate us.

Think about it. When was the last time a motivational speaker, manager, or colleague was able to, truly, get you fired up about something that you weren’t fired up about already? It’s rare.

When we are hired to do a job – or hire someone to do a job – we (they) are already highly motivated to perform well. We all know the feeling of starting a new assignment, a new job, tackling a difficult problem, or getting a promotion; we’re excited about what we can and want to accomplish. It’s a great feeling, being that motivated to get things done and done well. We have faith in and high expectations of ourselves. And we don’t need motivation from the “outside.” We’re already there – through self-motivation!

Performance falls off when we start getting “de-motivated,” not from the lack of proper management motivation. This doesn’t mean that some people may be in the wrong position, can over extend themselves or have other unrealistic expectations about their career and its path (they thought they could handle that CEO job without any experience), lacks the required job skills, the ability to create appropriate job knowledge or just plain confidence.

These things happen and can be legitimate reasons for poor performance or, seemingly, “un-motivated” individuals. These management challenges shouldn’t be overlooked when assessing our own, or those who we manage, performance capabilities.

But I’ll bet we all can go back and think about situations where we, or folks we worked with, were de-motivated, resulting in a slide in performance or other reactions. Consider the following (support mechanisms to counteract are left up to the reader):

We (generally, most people) like “belonging,” which is a common expectation when joining a group, a project, and other teams. While the feeling of belonging strengthens our motivations, we can be de-motivated by being ignored. You know, no “thank you’s,” one-on-one’s with the boss, or inclusion in project decisions.

We like being in control or, at least, have a feeling of being in control. We lose that feeling when we are not being told the entire truth about information or events that can have an impact on the decisions we have to make.

Related to the item above, we know we work better when we have the timely knowledge we need about the company, our group and sister groups, customer success or failure, etc. Also, we like getting feedback about our performance. We like being “in the loop.” Surprises about performance issues, project information, and customer needs only make us exclaim, “If I only knew...”

The feeling of achievement, i.e. successfully completing a project, solving a particularly hard problem, or going the extra mile for a customer, is something we live for. Think about the “motivational damage” that we sustain when we are not recognized for these and other contributions we make to the company’s success (only its failure?) or when recognition goes unshared when it should be shared.

A form of recognition extensively used in the business world is “rewards” (like pay, bonuses, promotional consideration and other perks). People will be “motivated” to search for greener pastures if they feel the system is unfairly applied – like to “favorite” groups and individuals. Or some types of rewards are not applied at all to some groups! Rewards – compensation – aren’t the main reason people perform well. But I’ll bet an unfair system, even if only perceived that way, is the real source of un-motivated individuals, not their pay.

Every job function in a company is there for a reason – to produce value for stakeholders. Each is essential to the company’s success (if not, get rid of it!) But watch the (non) performance of the folks who are in a job function that’s either overtly or inadvertently cast as “non-essential,” especially if it’s compared to another competency. If they feel it’s not important then it won’t be.

Have you ever brought a problem – like poorly defined processes, lack of training, outdated tools or poor product and service quality – to the attention of management (or the organization as a whole) and have it ignored? How motivated did you feel after that experience? People like to solve the real problems that hold back progress and potentially create unhappy customers. They like working for a company with a good reputation. When they see the problems go un-addressed, it can become a de-motivator.

We know how to do our jobs and we like the freedom and independence to “operate” according to our experiences, comfort levels, and knowledge. Trust is important. Repeatedly defending our schedules, the resources we forecast, and being forced to perform “their activities” kills innovation, a main source of self-motivation.

The last category is what I call “the petty de-motivator group.” It includes things like arguing with the boss or co-workers, being belittled, criticized, and demeaned. We like to enjoy our work and we don’t like an atmosphere of fear and coercion that crushes confidence. Prevention? Easy. Don’t do or tolerate these things!

I’m sure you can think of lots of other, specific situational de-motivators. And I’ll bet you can think of appropriate ways to ensure they don’t strike you or the people you work with. Awareness is 75% of the work to eliminate them.

People generally want to do their best. An environment that promotes quality performance and pride in one’s work will contribute greatly to preventing these de-motivators (and others) from occurring in the first place. It’s an environment that is courteous, enthusiastic, and firm in its resolve to promote company principles.

Don’t have any “public” company principles? Then develop and communicate them. And hire people, especially management, who believe in them! Ridding your company and organizations of de-motivators and developing principles to live by will add a fair amount of competitive value to your asset bank!

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