

Engage Employees



Topics:

- **Something on your mind? Persuasion.**
- **Get the monkeys off your back.**
- **You can do better than that.**
- **What you put out you get back.**
- **Walk the talk. Relationships.**
- **Motives – when winning is losing.**
- **You stupid bloody idiot!**
- **Ask questions to change motivation.**

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Something on your mind?

A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.

Abraham Lincoln.

Mindsets - set ways of thinking about things. How many managers would describe themselves as open minded? Possibly most. Yet is anybody really open minded?

All of us carry around in our mind a set of images - our store of life experiences and imaginings. Images about ourselves, our boss, our employees, our colleagues, our customers, the organisation, what's right, what's wrong, what makes sense to us and what doesn't.

These are deeply held beliefs or mindsets which govern our motivation and our behaviour. Often our mindsets will limit us to comfortable ways of behaving - saying and doing things within our comfort zone.

Many of the causes of reduced motivation in the workplace are related to the differing perceptions held by the various stakeholders. What we perceive in any given situation is dictated by the images and assumptions which are set in our mind or which we make about the situation.

What we say is often very different from what we are really thinking. But it is what we are really thinking which will dictate our behaviour.

Obviously, if what you are really thinking is counter-productive to the situation then keep it to yourself. But be aware that just because a person goes along with what you say, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have their conviction.

If you are attempting to persuade somebody to your point of view so that they are motivated to the course of action which you are proposing, try some of these things:

- Declare your own assumptions about the situation and seek to compare them against the known facts.
- Ask the other person to do the same with any assumptions which they might hold about the situation.
- As the discussion brings out information about the situation, try to separate facts from opinions or inferences.
- Discuss why and where your assumptions and their assumptions have come from.
- If you have pre-conceived ideas about the situation or the other person(s), state them as notions you hold which you are willing to have challenged.
- Ask the other person(s) to do the same with any pre-conceived ideas that they might hold.
- If it is not counter-productive, tell the other person what you are really thinking and feeling about the situation and let them know that this is really what you think. If you can't do this honestly - don't do it.
- Encourage the other person to tell you what they are really thinking by letting them know that it is important for them to do this and that you are sincerely interested.

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2

- Let them know that even if what they are really thinking is something unpleasant for you that you would rather know than not know.
- Ask them to describe the consequences of the situation on other stakeholders.
- Ask them to consider whose best interests are being served by the current situation or the proposed situation.
- Ask them why they feel unable to change.
- Ask them what it is that they are afraid of happening. What is it they are fearful of losing.
- Show them how what you are proposing benefits all stakeholders.
- Discuss with them any negative aspects of your proposal and the consequences on all stakeholders
- Ask them to describe the negative aspects of your proposal from their perspective and then explore with them the reality of these things actually happening.
- Ask them how they feel about things now that we have explored the situation in greater depth.
- Ask them what their level of conviction, commitment and motivation are to your proposal.
- Ask them what they will do as a result of this discussion.

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2

Get the monkeys off your back

How do you respond when a worker brings a problem to you which you think they are capable of resolving but suspect that they are just not motivated to solve the problem? Do you hear yourself saying, “OK. Leave it with me. I’ll sort it out later.”?

How can you motivate them to solve this problem and motivate them to solve future problems?

In this situation, picture the problem as a monkey on the worker’s back. Their intention is to get the monkey off their back and on to your’s. Your intention is to get the worker to get rid of the monkey, that is, resolve the problem.

If you are accountable and responsible for resolving the problem, then you deal with it. If the worker is responsible and accountable **and** has the capability, then send a clear message that you expect them to deal with it.

There is no doubt that some people are motivated to pass the buck up the line. They will keep doing this for as long as the manager lets them.

If your staff are leaving their problems on your desk and you know that they are capable of resolving them, try this approach:

A ‘buck passer’ will probably say to you, “We’ve got a problem.” At this point, focus on the thought - No. **We** don’t have a problem. **You** have a problem and that’s why we pay you - to solve work problems.

Then ask the worker questions similar to these:

- What is the problem? What are the symptoms of the problem? What are the causes of the problem?
- If they haven’t got to the root cause of the problem, keep asking them, “Why do you think that is?” until they get there.
- Who are all the stakeholders? Who are the people who are affected by this problem?
- If we could solve this problem, what would be the ideal outcomes for all key stakeholders?
- What are all the possible things which could be done to solve the problem? What does your intuition tell you to do?
- Don’t accept, “I don’t know.” Prompt them with questions such as these - What might be possible? What could you try? What has worked in the past? What would happen if you were to...?
- Help them to make a list of possible courses of action.
- Ask the worker to consider the consequences of each possible action if it were to be implemented. What would happen if we did this? Will this resolve the problem? How would this affect others? Do we have the resources to do this? Is it really feasible? Will it achieve our outcomes? Will it remove the root cause? Will it create new problems?
- Ask the worker to choose the actions which will provide the best solution. Which actions will resolve the problem with the most positive consequences and the least negative consequences? Will those actions provide the desired outcomes for the stakeholders?

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2

- Agree the sequence of actions to implement.
- Ask the worker to begin implementation and let you know the outcomes or progress made in the following day, week or whatever is appropriate.

Reinforce and recognise right efforts and right results.



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You can do better than that

Using agreed indicators of performance, managers can monitor the efforts and outcomes of both team and individual performance. When team and/or individual performance don't come up to the required standards, it's the manager's responsibility to take corrective action.

In the case of individuals, the manager needs to act in such a way as to motivate the individual to improve and to do it without resistance. The consequences of doing nothing when a member of the work group is not performing can be serious.

It will frustrate other members of the team and affect your credibility as a manager as well as affect external and internal customers of your work group. It is important that you are seen to act to address the situation by other members of your team.

You can try and force compliance through threats and penalties, but for these to work you will probably have to apply them continuously and you are unlikely to change the root cause of the problem. You can get somebody to do something against their will, but they are likely to do it half-heartedly, or make it a low priority, or do it at a sub-standard level or find some way to sabotage your efforts.

Your goal is to have the person motivated to change their behaviour, not focussing on the way they were treated. **Try these guidelines to improving motivation and performance:**

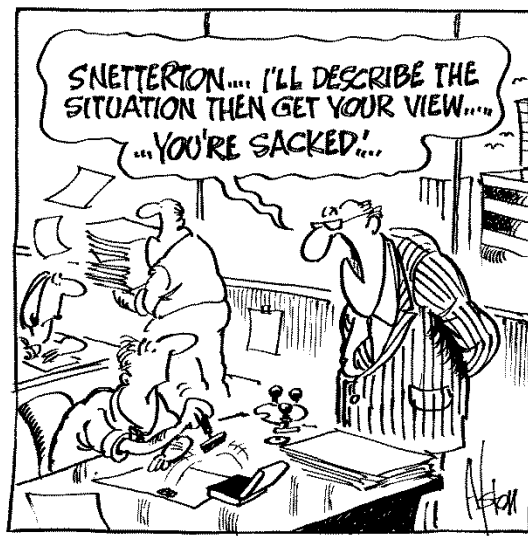
- Prior to the meeting, collect behavioural evidence related to the problem.
- Set up a meeting in private.
- Explain that you have a problem and that you need their help to resolve it.
- Set the condition that each person talks without interruption until they have finished their point.
- State what you perceive to be the situation. Describe things objectively without making any judgement.
- Explain the consequences of the situation on you, other members of the team and on other stakeholders including the person themselves.
- Explain why it is important that you have to do something and why you are having this discussion. Explain that the only way to really resolve the situation is with their co-operation.
- Ask them how they view the situation. How they rate their performance. How they compare with others.
- Ask them what's causing the situation. Are there things happening that you are unaware of? Are they not happy working here? Discuss what you see as causing the situation.
- Ask them how their current behaviour is benefiting them.
- Discuss solutions together. Add your own suggestions when no worthwhile suggestions are raised or you want to extend those given.
- Agree what action each of you will take to resolve the situation. Both parties should note the same agreements.

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2

- Agree a time frame for when you expect performance to be satisfactory.
- Agree a date and time to meet again and review the situation.
- Discuss the choices that each of you can make in this situation. Ask them to consider the probable consequences if the situation continues for both of you including consequences for non-compliance.
- Ask if they feel that you have treated them fairly. Let them know that you believe that they are capable of better and that is what you expect of them.
- Tell them that you will keep reviewing the situation with them until it is resolved.



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What you put out you get back

Work is more pleasant, motivating and productive if a manager builds and maintains good relationships with staff. Easier said than done. Let's face it, there are some people who you will instinctively dislike. Putting aside your prejudices is not easy and once a relationship is damaged it takes a lot of understanding, enlightenment and will to repair.

There will always be a few hardheads who may be too damaged by past experiences to see that their behaviour is actually counter-productive and that by winning they are really losing. However, most people respond reasonably when they perceive that you are treating them reasonably. Sometimes you have to look for the butterfly not the grub.

Five ways to better relationships.

1. Work on your self-concept.

- Remind yourself that you are an important human being. Accentuate the positive aspects about yourself. Allow yourself to be imperfect and make errors and fail occasionally - everybody you know does, why not you too? Remember we learn more from our 'failures' than from our successes. You can't always be right all of the time.

2. Listen with three ears.

- Have a purpose for listening.
- Look at the person.
- Suspend judgement initially.
- Ignore distractions. If distracted - apologise, explain that you got distracted and ask them to say it again.
- Wait before responding.
- Paraphrase to the speaker's satisfaction.
- Be on the lookout for the important themes of what the speaker says.
- See the world from their position.
- Reflect on the content of what you hear and search for meaning.
- Be ready to respond.

3. Be clear and precise in your expression.

- Remind yourself that the other person is not a mind reader.
- Don't leave people guessing about what you mean.
- Ask more questions than you make statements.
- Describe events with detachment. Just describe what happened – don't label it or use judgemental adjectives.

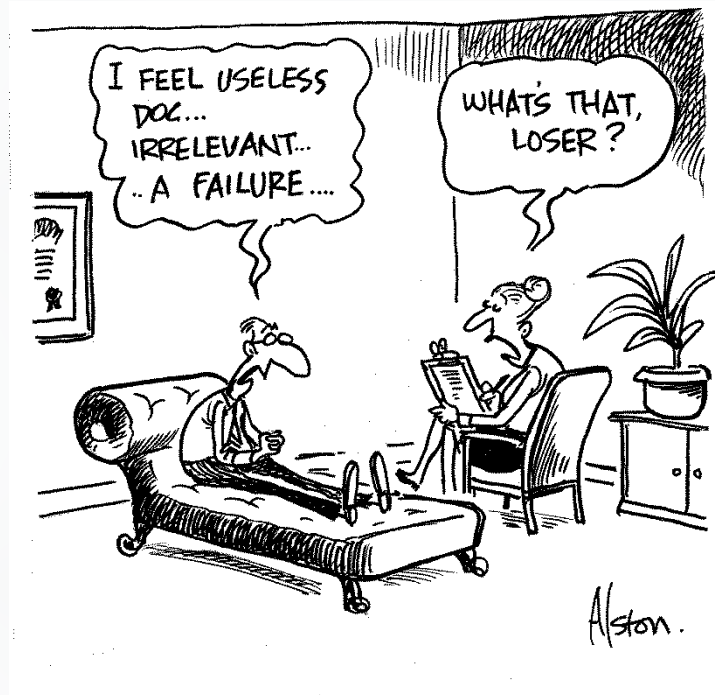


4. Cope with angry feelings.

- Be aware of your feelings - don't deny or suppress them.
- Observe the strength of the feeling and its source.
- Overcome the urge to say things which are fuelled by anger. Wait until you have a calmer and clearer perspective. Most things said in anger are regretted later.
- Accept responsibility for what you do.
- Talk about how you feel. Make no accusations.
- See the connection between your thinking and your feelings.

5. Be ready for self-disclosure.

Talk fully and truthfully about yourself where it is not harmful to you or the other person. Treat with respect what other people tell you about themselves.



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Walk the talk

If (a man) is brusque in his manner, others will not co-operate. If he is agitated in his words, they will awaken no echo in others. If he asks for something without having first established a (proper) relationship, it will not be given to him.

I Ching: Book of Changes, China, c. 600 B.C.

Civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof.

John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963

Thirty-fifth President of the United States, Inaugural address, 1961

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...

Matthew Ch VII v 12

One of the contributing factors to motivation is the quality of the relationships that each person has with their team mates. In many work environments, it is a significant reason why people come to work. And for some people, those relationships and the social contact satisfy unmet needs in their personal lives.

The relationship the manager creates, builds and maintains with each person is also an important contributor to motivation. The manager is a key part of the external environment which influences the motivation of their people. How the manager conducts themselves can have a big impact on the levels of motivation of each person.

As with all other things, relationships need to be developed, maintained and nurtured.

Here are some ideas for developing and maintaining motivating interpersonal relationships.

Build trust

- Be predictable and reliable. Explain any deviations from your normal behaviour.
- Communicate clearly. Avoid saying you will do things you don't intend to do. Make sure others are clear about whether you are making a commitment or just talking about possibilities.
- Take your promises seriously. Write them down and act on them. Review them regularly.

Help others to be more reliable

- Don't overload trust. Take action which reduces risk, e.g. avoid leaving money lying around.
- Trust others when they deserve it. Don't let your aversion to risk, your perfectionism or need for control stop you from delegating.
- Be specific in praise and criticism. Give feedback which is fair, accurate and about specific behaviour. Use verifiable examples.

Treat problems as opportunities, not crimes

Use each incident of apparent unreliability as an opportunity to reduce the likelihood of it happening again. It helps to remember that our intentions are usually honourable and that sometimes our execution is flawed. Also, people are usually doing the best they can according to what they know and believe at that moment in time.



Mind your manners

- Don't talk about colleagues behind their back. If you do, what do you think the person you are telling is learning about you?
- Treat all your staff fairly. Don't delegate the good jobs only to your favourites.
- Praise in public and criticise in private.
- Remember common courtesies like please and thank you.
- If you discover that you are wrong, acknowledge it, adjust your mistake and apologise.
- Give credit when its due to the source. Don't put forward other people's work or ideas as your own.
- Treat all people regardless of status with respect.



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2

Motives - when winning is losing

In every workplace, there are a number of misfits whose motives are to be disruptive, upset people, do what they want to do instead of what is required, and generally act as an irritant to others. They can be a bit tricky too because they will often not do anything too obvious but will play their games in subtle ways which makes it hard to pin anything on them.

As they play their immature games, they get a sense of smugness because they think that they are winning. They lack the awareness to see that in the bigger picture, the bigger scheme of things – they are actually losing. But they can't see the connection with the way they conduct themselves and the consequences they experience in their life – in or out of work.

Their 'whole of life' wheel will probably be out of whack. Something will be badly out of balance. There is a good chance that they will use alcohol or other drugs as a means to block out their frustrations, anger or unhappiness.

In the short term, they will experience what they perceive as wins. They might think that that is as good as it gets. Because of their attitude and their behaviour they may never have experienced anything better.

But they miss out on so much in terms of the relationships they could have, both in and out of the workplace, in terms of the immensely powerful buzz of achievement satisfaction they would experience by being accepted as one of the team and working in harmony with others.

They may satisfy their 'limited thinking' desires for revenge or for the short lasting moments of false power they get or the false adulation from like-minded co-workers which causes them to think that they are winning.

In reality, somewhere inside there will dwell an unhappy chappy - they will have unmet wants.

It is a vicious circle that they are usually ignorant of and don't even realise that they are creating their own consequences.

Here is an example drawn from real life. An operator (Peter) needed another operator (Joe) to finish a task so that he could get on with his job. Peter asked Joe, who was not busy at the time, if he would finish this task as he was waiting on him. Joe told Peter "f... off. I'll do it when I'm ready." Over the next half hour Peter asked Joe on 3 more occasions to finish the task. Joe thought this was great fun and he was letting Peter know that Joe would decide when he would finish this task, not Peter. He thought he was being real smart. To his warped way of thinking, Joe was 'winning' this little one-sided power play.

The real consequence for Joe? This lack of co-operation was observed by others (who Joe was playing up to anyway) and just added to Joe's reputation of not being part of the team, of being a trouble maker, of being difficult to work with, of having motives other than for the benefit of teamwork and co-operation. This just added further distance between Joe

and the others. The others never went out of their way to help Joe. They didn't include him as much in their social interactions. They didn't give him any affection or appreciation or respect. It always took more effort to deal with Joe, so if they could avoid him, they did.

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2

So Joe, instead of basking in the warmth of the human relations that the others shared in, lost out on those feelings of belonging and acceptance – so important to all human beings.

Naturally, Joe, lacking awareness and insight, looked to blame others for his situation. His belief system was limiting and counter-productive. He was driven by his need to fulfil his many unmet wants instead of adopting the belief that the treatment he received from others was directly related to his ways of behaving. He couldn't see the connection.

To try and change Joe's motives, you could ask him these types of questions:

- Joe, how much do you really enjoy working here?
- How much do others enjoy working with you?
- When you say or do _____, how do you think the others feel about you?
- How do you think it affects their attitude to you?
- How do you think it affects their desire to help you?
- How do you reckon you gain by doing these things? What's the pay-off for you? Why do you do this?
- What would happen for you if you didn't do this?
- What would you lose? What would you gain?
- How would that make a difference?
- What's the connection between the vibes you put out and the vibes you get back?
- What could it be like for you to work here? How much happier could you be at work?
- When you do these things, who do you reckon loses? Who wins? How?
- He will probably start by answering untruthfully with "I don't know." "I don't care." Don't accept these responses. Use silence and just repeat the questions or ask them in slightly different ways.

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You stupid bloody idiot!

The praising of people for (what) they don't deserve is the surest way of making them contemptible, and leading others into thinking of their faults.

Sarah Fielding, 1710-1768, English author, David Simple.

Reinforcements continue to be important, of course, long after an organism has learned how to do something, long after it has acquired behaviour. They are necessary to maintain the behaviour in strength.

B.F. Skinner, Harvard University, Harvard Educational Review, 1954.

That's a very motivating statement isn't it? Guaranteed to encourage a person to improve their performance. Employee surveys confirm that employees rate recognition and praise very highly among things that keep them motivated. Yet surveys continue to reveal that praise and recognition occur far less frequently than employees would prefer.

There are probably several reasons for this. One may be that we tend to take for granted that staff should do a good job anyway - that that's to be expected, that's what they are paid to do. It is easy to forget the power of praise and recognition. Another reason is that managers are too busy, caught up in their own concerns and lose sight of the need to recognise and praise good performance.

It may be a gender thing - female managers seem to be more comfortable with praising their staff than male managers. Whatever it is, most people respond positively to recognition and praise. The more boring and routine the nature of the work, the more the requirement for recognition and praise.

Here are some guidelines for recognition and praise:

- Establish standards and clearly communicate them so that employees know what good performance looks like. Regularly discuss your expectations and perceptions of staff performance.
- Keep your ears and eyes open to look for things which merit praise. Look for opportunities to praise and recognise every employee not just your favourites.
- Look for opportunities to praise right efforts as well as right results.
- Consider life from the employee's perspective. What for you might be an easy accomplishment might be quite difficult for the employee.
- Be sincere. Avoid phoney praise. This is unwarranted praise given in the hope that employees will perform well. Provide praise when there is evidence that the employee has performed well or is making improvements.
- Give praise as soon as possible. Immediate recognition is the most effective - left too long, it loses effect.
- Describe in specific terms what the employee did which warrants the praise and how others may be positively affected by their actions.

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2

- Look for opportunities to praise the team as well as individuals.
- Give credit publicly to the team for their achievements.
- Remind yourself constantly that praise and recognition are powerful motivators and that if you make the time to look you will find reason to recognise and praise.



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Ask questions to change motivation

Patience is the companion of wisdom

St Augustine

Three rules of work: 1. Out of clutter, find simplicity. 2. From discord, find harmony. 3. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity

Albert Einstein

There is no failure. Only feedback

Anonymous

Some managers when commenting on someone's performance tend to make statements that are perceived as judgemental and critical – even when they don't intend them to be. This immediately often gets the other person on the back foot – on the defensive. His or her focus may now be on protecting their self-image or their sense of self-worth. So we are off on the wrong foot to begin with. Not conducive to a productive discussion about a person's level of motivation and performance.

A far better way is to not make statements, but to ask questions. This is more likely to lead the person to the awareness that they need to be better motivated and to resolve their problem issue.

Here are some examples of questions to ask of somebody whose motivation and performance could be better – not in any particular order and assuming that you have set the scene with some preliminary remarks and created an environment suitable for this discussion. Pick ones that suit you, the other person and the situation.

- How do you feel about the outcome here for you and others?
- How do other people see your behaviour?
- How do you feel about your level of motivation?
- How do other people see your level of motivation?
- What were your intentions or motives in this situation?
- What's your perception of the issues here?
- What could be other perceptions?
- How could your perceptions differ from others?
- Which of all these perceptions are facts.
- What may be the assumptions you and others are making?
- What information are you using in this situation?
- What other information could be useful?
- What does this situation mean for you?
- What's the meaning of your actions here?

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2

- How could your actions be interpreted?
- What beliefs do you hold about this situation?
- What beliefs could others hold?
- What other beliefs could also be used by you?
- Which of your beliefs are facts?
- What interpretations have you placed on this issue?
- What are other interpretations that could also be placed on this issue?
- What are other ways that this situation could have been handled?
- What could have worked better for you and for others?
- How would you have to change your thinking to enable you to act in a better way? What would need to happen to cause that change to your way of thinking?

Remember, our intentions are usually honourable. It is our execution that may be flawed.