Title:
Motivating Others – What's The Real Answer?

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Summary:
Whether you are an employer, manager, teacher or parent, we are all at some stage keen to get answers to the age old question of "How to motivate others?" Bob Selden of the National Learning Institute™ suggests some novel responses.

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So, economics and statistics are the flavour of the month, or more specifically "Freakonomics" (Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, Penquin Books 2006). In a quote from Levitt's website, "Through forceful storytelling and wry insight, Levitt and co-author Stephen J. Dubner show that economics is, at root, the study of incentives - how people get what they want, or need, especially when other people want or need the same thing." And Levitt & Dubner do have many interesting, amusing and sometimes disturbing (at least to me) stories to tell.

For example, take the case of the child care centre that was having difficulty with a few parents picking up their children late. It was decided to institute a late pick up fee of $3. As you might have guessed, this did not stop the late parents and in fact their numbers increased from about 8 to 20! By introducing the fee, late pick ups had just been legitimised and ameliorated the parents feeling of guilt.

Levitt and Dubner suggest that incentives, to be effective, need to have three components – economic, social and moral. In the child care case, would increasing the late fee to $100, posting the names of the late parents on a public list and running discussion groups on the implications of late pick ups for children and parents, have changed the parent's behaviour? The answer is unequivocally, "Yes".

Another example given is cigarettes. Levitt and Dubner suggest that in the US,

the tax of around $3 or so on cigarettes (economic), no smoking laws in restaurants (social) and publicising the profits being made by terrorist groups through black market cigarette sales (moral) have successfully combined all three incentive ingredients to stop people smoking. And they are right.

But (and in this case it's a big "but") do incentives work? Do they motivate people? On the cover of their book they suggest "Assume nothing – question everything", and I'm taking them up on this challenge. I agree that incentives work – they can change people's behaviour. However, what do you get when you introduce incentives (even those that include the three components)? Incentives produce compliance, they do not produce commitment. The second thing that happens once incentives are introduced, is that they need to be repeated! And repeated, and repeated! Once started they cannot be stopped – a right given is a right expected.

As an employer, manager, parent or teacher (or child care centre manager), do you want compliant people or committed people? Wouldn't it be so much easier to be an employer, manager, teacher or parent if incentives really worked in the way that they are intended? Unfortunately, because the incentive has only changed behaviour and not motivation, when we take away the incentive, it is most likely that people will revert to their old behaviour. Whereas with committed people, even when conditions change, they are far more likely to remain motivated. (Mind you assume nothing – question everything, always be wary of equating correlation with causation. They are often not the same thing.)

In regards to managers and compliance, a colleague of mine Peter Nicholls wrote recently, "Managing people was so much easier when you could just concern yourself with who they were from the time they walked into the workplace until the decreed knock-off time. Staff had each taken a vow to daily serve the organization fully and faithfully until home-time us do part". However, today's manager needs people who are committed and therefore perform at their best. Compliance most often only brings mediocre performance.

If you as an employer, manager, parent or teacher, want committed rather than compliant people, how do you get them?

There are three things that you need to do:

1. Select the best people and then train, coach, develop and manage them well (parents and teachers may have some challenges with "selection", but they can certainly train, coach, develop and manage appropriately).

2. Make sure that there is a "values match" between what they believe in and

what the organisation believes in.

3. Provide them with sufficient recognition (not rewards, nor incentives) that will encourage them to maintain their motivation.

The first item, "people selection and training" is the topic of a future article. In previous articles ("Are Your Employees Motivated?" and "Have You Been Appreciated Lately?" - http://www.nationallearninginstitute.com/) I have clearly laid out the case for item three, "recognition". In the remainder of this article, I'd like to focus on the "values match".

Why "values match" as one component of gaining commitment? Our research with employees (in focus groups and interviews) across many organisations and industries over the last 20 years, suggests that:

• People join an organisation because of the role (and sometimes the reputation of the organisation)

• People leave organisations because of poor management and leadership (not as you might expect for a better job or more money – these things generally come after they have decided to leave)

• People stay in the organisation (assuming management and leadership are o.k.) because they share the same values as those they work with and of the organisation.

How do you get (and maintain) a "values match"? You can do it either informally or formally.

In discussions with a teacher recently, she mentioned that her principal was always focussing on problem students. For example, during break periods in the staff room, the principal would continually ask teachers about the problems they were having with students. This encouraged a values match within the teachers that suggested the best way to get noticed by the principal was to bring up "problem" students in discussions with him. The values match informally being reinforced by the principal here was a negative one of "problems". This contrasts quite dramatically with the experience of my own children who each had the fortune to have as a principal someone who encouraged a positive values match. He would regularly be seen in the grounds talking with students during breaks about what they were interested in. When he visited a classroom or made formal presentations to students, he continually focussed on positive things that particular students had done (these were not the standard awards, but rather behaviour, special interests, sport, academic and so on). He knew the

interests (and values) of the students from his informal discussions with them and made a point of asking each teacher what were the positive things that their students were doing.

In a formal way, you can uncover the "values match" by running some team discussions with your people around the "Ideal World" concept – i.e. "If you had the chance to work / live / participate / attend in an ideal organisation / school / family, what would it look like? What would people in this ideal situation do?" The results of the ensuing discussion will then give you a very good lead to the values that your people have in relation to the workplace, organisation, school or family.