



Motivating Lazy Employees

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“ While I am motivated, many of my employees are not. Some are lazy, doing just the amount they can get away with – enough to keep their jobs”, so lamented a business owner. “Why can’t I motivate them? Why this laziness?”

1. The Myth of Motivation

Let’s dispel a myth: you cannot motivate your employees; you can only remove the barriers to motivation. People motivate themselves. The more de-motivators you remove, the less ‘lazy’ your employees will be.

A recent publication said that Hallmark sold 85,000 birthday cards for people celebrating their 100th birthday last year. What motivates people to acknowledge the 100 birthdays? Is it Hallmark’s wonderful image (extrinsic motivator) or is it people’s desire to share the occasion with dear ones (intrinsic motivator)? You know the answer. This is true for everyone.

2. Barriers to Motivation

Thus, you need to take steps to remove the intrinsic barriers to motivation, some of which are:

- Misalignment of values
- Lack of respect for the employee
- Poor boss-employee relationship
- Lack of employee self-actualization

Let’s look at the first two, briefly.

3. Misalignment of Values

This is the easiest one to deal with from our point of view. We simply match a ‘P’ person to a ‘P’ job, hiring accordingly. However, most people have not been exposed to the significance of PAVF¹ but clearly encounter the problem of misalignment. When such misalignment occurs, you have a hopeless situation unless you make a change. For example, the person is a curious employee, asking questions: ‘why?’ or ‘why not?’ It is an employee who likes to take risks and is full of ideas. Put this kind of individual in an environment where such creativity is frowned upon by responses such as: “Don’t ask so many questions; just do it the way we say.” Or, “You have too many ideas; can’t you just get at your job?”

With such responses, the person’s inner drives are thwarted. The individual becomes frustrated, unhappy and de-motivated. A de-motivated person will pay lip-service to a job and tend to join the ranks of the ‘lazy’.

We are not talking about right and wrong, simply misalignment of values. The person described above is a ‘V’ with inherent (we say, hard-wired)

specific values (innovative, curious, adventurous) whereas the individual’s working environment could be ‘A’ with just the opposite values (specifically: logical, predictable, regular, risk-averse, repetitive, careful and thorough).

The solution is easy. Get that person out of that wrong environment. The worker will never be able to adjust. Oh yes, the individual might learn to adjust – but this employee, with a fundamental misalignment of values, will always remain dissatisfied with the work – remain unmotivated.

4. Respect

It is one thing to preach respect; it is quite another to practice it. What is respect? Respect is appreciating each person’s sovereignty over ideas and thoughts. Respect is allowing those thoughts to exist and to validate that they exist – but you don’t have to agree with them. However, you do not trivialize them. Avoid: “Why on earth would you think that way?” Instead the response might be: “You like to brainstorm a lot. Good for you. However, I don’t have much time for it.” The person, encountering such a response senses an agreement to disagree – which is positive.

Respect is being willing to listen to people with ideas different than your own, hearing them out and allowing them to express thoughts that you do not necessarily agree with. It is about not cutting them off nor quickly injecting your own opinion on, nor defending, the subject. The simplest, most effective response you should give is: “I see.”

Respect entails appreciating the value of other people’s time – regardless of their rank, of not keeping them waiting. All of us have only so many minutes to live on this planet. No President, no executive, no person at all, has the right to ‘steal’ another person’s living minutes.

Conclusion: If you are sensitive to misalignment and if you show respect, you will go a long way towards helping motivate your employees.

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¹ PAVF is a trademark of CCCC. See www.caswellccc.com.