

## **A Motivated Team, A More Effective Team**

***The process of managing people is as old as history itself but modern scientific management is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. The question of how to keep employees motivated is one that would draw very different ideas today as compared to during the industrial age, which might subscribe to a more Freudian, 'stick and carrot' notion of motivation. Sigmund Freud's view of people was that they were lazy, have no ambition, take no initiative and avoid taking responsibility. Thus to get people to do any work they must be recompensed, coerced, intimidated and punished.***

Abraham Maslow's refreshing detraction from Freud's theory, on the other hand, might better resonate with the present day workforce. His 'Hierarchy of Needs' theory suggests that human behaviour is dominated by unsatisfied needs and that man is a perpetually wanting animal, for when one needs is satisfied, he aspires for the next higher one. The five levels of needs, according to Maslow, in ascending order are: physiological; safety; love and belonging; esteem; and self-actualisation.<sup>1</sup> This is therefore an on-going activity where man is perpetually on a path of attaining perfection through self-development.

In the 1950s and 1960s Frederick Herzberg explored the question of what people want in their job as a means of understanding job

satisfaction. The results formed the basis of his 'Motivation-Hygiene' theory<sup>2</sup>, whose conclusions have been extremely influential and still represent the bedrock of good motivation practice today. Herzberg's findings revealed that certain characteristics of a job are consistently related to job satisfaction. These are the motivation factors, such as achievement, recognition, rewarding work, responsibility, advancement and growth. Different factors however are associated with job dissatisfaction, and these are referred to as hygiene factors, such as company policies; supervision, work conditions, salary, security and relationships with bosses and peers.

According to Herzberg, the factors leading to job satisfaction are separate and distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Therefore, remedying the causes of dissatisfaction will not create satisfaction, nor will adding the factors of job satisfaction eliminate job dissatisfaction. In a hostile work environment, for instance, giving and employee more responsibility or a promotion will not make him satisfied.

### **Motivation is a leadership imperative**

The continuing quest to keep teams motivated is driven by the belief that having an engaged, motivated workforce presents a huge competitive advantage in the market. A motivated workforce unlocks potential, unleashes talent, accelerates productivity and propels innovation.

Taking a logical look at the theories, such as Maslow's and Herzberg's, we can derive

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* in "Psychological Review" (Vol. 50, July 1943), pp. 370-396.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Herzberg, *One More Time: How do you Motivate Employees (1968)*, reprinted in "Harvard Business Review", (January 2003), pp 87-93.

glimpses of how teams can be motivated. We could surmise that employees will, in general, naturally seek advancement in their lives and where the workplace is concerned this will not only come in the form of Herzberg's motivation factors, but also with the necessary hygiene factors in place.

This may sound straightforward enough, yet according to studies, organisations have some way to go. A survey in 2013 by staffing agency, Kelly Services, covering 120,000 respondents globally, found that a staggering 48 per cent of employees are unhappy in their current jobs.<sup>3</sup>

This supports Gallup's research released the same year, the State of the American Workplace Report, which revealed that just 30 per cent of American workers feel engaged at work, 52 per cent are present but not motivated and 18 per cent are actively disengaged, meaning they actively voice and spread discontent throughout the organisation.<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, perks do not necessarily remedy the situation.

It is no wonder that progressive organisations are continuously looking for ways to make their people happier in their jobs. The following are eight modern day practices that are known to positively influence motivation in the workplace.

### **1. Confidence in the leadership**

Believing in leaders, believing in their vision for the organisation and believing they are competent keeps employees motivated even if they are not close to their leaders on a personal level. People do not have to love their leaders to be happy, but they must at least be convinced of their leaders' capability in steering the organisation in the right direction. When employees have faith in where the organisation is heading, it makes them more likely to

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<sup>3</sup> Ansuya Harjani, "Nearly Half of Global Employees Unhappy in Jobs: Survey" in *www.CNBC.com* (17 September 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Kelli B. Grant, "Americans Hate Their Jobs Even with Perks" in *USA Today* (30 June 2013).

wholeheartedly follow their leader and keeps them on track. The contrary however causes loyalties to fray and people to even become subversive.

A study by CultureAmp, an Australian company that analyses employee engagement, executive leadership is responsible for the major proportion of motivation factors. According to CultureAmp, bosses who inspire confidence, who show faith in their employees, and who communicate an inspiring vision are rewarded with a workforce that is ready to get things done.<sup>5</sup>

### **2. Meaningful work**

According to the 2013 Philips Work/ Life Survey, a job that's personally fulfilling is seen by the majority of workers to be preferred and even worth sacrifices in salary.<sup>6</sup>

Gen Y workers are known for seeking jobs that are personally satisfying and inspiring to them, but according to the study, the same applies to Gen X as well. In fact, in the United States, 55 per cent of Gen X and Gen Y have changed career paths to integrate work and personal life in a more meaningful way. And 96 per cent of them believe that being able to apply personal passions and interests in their career will make them happier in general, and 68 per cent of them are willing to take salary cuts to allow for this.

Organisations should therefore explore personal interests and passions, not just qualifications, in order to recruit and place the right the people in the right jobs.

### **3. Growth and progress**

The opportunities within the organisation and the climate that promotes personal growth and development is another important motivator. It is undeniable that financial reward is important but

<sup>5</sup> George Anders, "Morale-Lifting Secrets: 5 Factors that Surpass 'Balance' or Pay" in *Forbes.com* (3 April 2013).

<sup>6</sup> "More Americans Pursuing Meaning Over Money at Work, Survey Finds" in *Huffington Post* (11 September 2013)

a salary without development indicates a dead end after some time, and will eventually sap the enthusiasm out of any worker.

A fair chance to take on greater responsibility with adequate opportunities for learning and development gives employees a long term horizon of opportunity for growth that they can look forward to and strive towards.

Actions that make good employees feel unappreciated or taken for granted on the other hand will drive them to look elsewhere.

#### **4. Trust**

Trust equates with autonomy in the workplace. If the right people have been selected and placed in the right jobs, they should be trusted to get the job done, without being micromanaged.

Micromanagement and layers of checking and approval tells the employee that his judgment and his work is not trusted and this can be a major trigger of disengagement and dissatisfaction.

Related to this is the ability for employees to effect changes if beneficial and can add value. However, if new ideas go unheeded or have to go through endless layers of red tape, employees will lose any motivation or passion to add value. Processes and procedures should be there to enhance effectiveness, not to create unnecessary obstacles. The same applies to rules such as restrictive working hours, days off or internet usage, where workers may feel controlled and untrusted rather than appreciated.

#### **5. Communication**

People need and appreciate a clear chain of command and access to bosses. It can be very frustrating if an employee faces a problem or requires help or advice and cannot access the right people or cannot figure out who to approach or what to do or get a timely response. Such a situation causes people to lose trust in their employer. Leaders must clarify directions, and

the chain of command and have readily available avenues for employees in case of a problem. Roles and task assignments should also be clear to avoid overwork, redundant work and frustration.

People working within a team as well as between teams also rely on effective communication to keep everyone on the same page. Respectful and honest behaviour by team members, contributes to a positive workplace environment and good team performance. In a high performing collaborative team, members are encouraged to participate in discussions and listen to the opinions of others. Such teams consist tactful communicators who value the opinions of their fellow team members who willingly contribute to conversations. Disagreements are allowed, rather than discouraged and morale improves as managers and workers embrace different ways of communicating with each other. Therefore, promoting an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue is key.

A lack of communication, on the other hand, can lead to mistakes, missteps, delays and wasted time. Eventually, employees will begin to blame each other and discord can arise, taking a toll on the workplace environment.

#### **6. Amicable relationships at work**

Related to the point above is that friendships in the workplace boost employee satisfaction, especially considering that the workplace is where one spends most of one's time outside the home. The importance of working with people one gets along with cannot be overstated. Pleasant co-workers make up for a lot of ills and the reverse is also true. A high-paying, esteemed and challenging role can also be a source of stress and misery if one works alongside a group of malicious or backstabbing peers.

Being able to communicate freely and have discussions at a commensurate wavelength, as well as share laughs, pleasantries and social

gatherings with colleagues creates happiness at work. It allows people to feel more relaxed and at home. It creates a sense of belonging to the organisation and is hence more likely to make employees engage fully in their work.

## 7. Performance management

An efficient performance management system supports motivation through a clear goal setting process, fair feedback provided by managers and strong consequence management.

While many organizations act on top performers and high potentials, most fail on acting on mediocre and low performers. If employees perceive that the organisation sees mediocrity as acceptable and takes no action on mediocre or low performers, they are likely to become demotivated, disengage and carry out roles on autopilot with the minimum possible effort. When this happens, the organisation is effectively lowering the average for everyone.

## 8. Job security

Employees who see their jobs as expendable, are treated in ways that constantly make them feel expendable or who see their organisations as a sinking ship will invest just enough to secure their pay check while looking for opportunities elsewhere. The bulk of their energy will be spent planning their next move and updating their resumes.

The challenge for leaders in times of crises is firstly to communicate frequently, and demonstrate to their teams a sense of loyalty and trust. Even if leaders cannot, in all fairness, expect people to stay under uncertain conditions, they can encourage transparency on both sides to avoid any surprises.

Organisations that are serious about keeping people motivated will also give due recognition to those deemed as assets and who are most needed in steering the organisation out of troubled waters.

## Conclusion

People want to be part of healthy organisational cultures, those marked by high morale, high productivity, minimal confusion, minimal politics, and low turnover. It is natural for career seekers to desire growth and improvement and to want to invest themselves in the success of the organization.

Unfortunately, many organizations fail to place enough focus on the potentially game-changing competitive advantage of a motivated workforce because their default strategy is to emphasise operational factors like KPIs, marketing, technology, and finance. Keeping motivation up is a cultural matter, and only if addressed can it have a lasting positive impact.

So the questions to ask are: Are all the above factors of motivation in place in the organisation? Is the culture in the organisation a healthy one? What does the organisation do to really unleash the potential within their employees?

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