

Safety Motivation: Hands and Feet, or Hearts and Minds?  
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Leaders impact performance and influence culture and the sustainability of results. The leader's ability to inspire and influence will become his single most effective, competitive advantage. Once a higher level is reached in an organization, individuals are less judged by what they have personally contributed, and more by what they have led others to accomplish. Sustainable excellence develops from a motivated and inspired work force; it is not the result of behavioral manipulation or managed delegation. We must realize people do things, and don't do things, for a reason.

Do employees perform excellently because you inspire them to, or because they are fearful? Does performance occur because you are leading it, or because it is being managed? Do you have a have-to or a want-to culture? Does an employee do something because they were told to or because it fits into a strategy or goal?

If required effort and results are presented as edicts or threats, you will often move hands and feet, but will rarely influence hearts and minds. It is natural for leaders to forget how motivation works. Humans cannot motivate other humans. Motivation is driven by our desires to seek positives or avoid negatives. Motivation is different than behavior; there's a chance someone might be motivated but still not perform. Similarly, someone might not be motivated, but behave in a desired way. But, what happens when you walk away? How sustainable is the behavior? Leaders cannot be omnipresent, but consequences must be timely and consistent. This is why threats of negative consequences, like discipline, rarely produce sustained results, and positive feedback never occurs enough. Motivation, however, outlasts even the best or worst leader's influence.

Realizing motivation can be difficult: it is easy for well-intentioned leaders to haphazardly implement incentive schemes to prompt desirable behavior. Rewarding for exemplar performance should be a part of your approach to performance management, but it should not be the driving force. If behavior only occurs because of the anticipated incentive or reward, what happens when the reward is removed? If an individual or team doesn't accomplish a goal, thus missing the opportunity to be rewarded, are they more upset about not receiving the reward or not accomplishing the goal? Motivation is difficult, but sustaining motivation is even more so.

To influence motivation, be sure to provide rationale in addition to providing a vision of the goal and the steps to accomplish it. Moreover, ensure the rationale is expressed in a manner that highlights not just the value-add to you and the organization but also to the individual's values and priorities whose behavior is requested. If you fail to answer the "What's In It For Me?" (WIIFM) question, you might get behavior, but it may be without motivation. Consider past performance or change efforts that didn't obtain the desired results. How personal did you make the expressed rationale to the individual? Was greater attention placed on the desired results and consequences for non-performance?

While motivation is internal, there are certainly external elements that will both positively and negatively affect it. In any desired change, if the systems, cultural acceptance, programs, process, tools, etc. do not align with the direction or targeted goals, or if they conflict with it, the desired intrinsic motivation created will wane.

Leaders create settings in which employees feel either motivated or demotivated. What they do and say (or don't do and say) will often have a greater impact than the environment itself. Motivating a team is one of the hardest roles a leader plays, but it is the most rewarding and effective thing they can do.