



Fear and inspiration: Two sides of the motivational coin

Motivating others through fear is the simplest approach to stimulate movement, due to its primitive nature in humans. When we are scared, threatened or feel a loss of respect, we fight, flee or freeze. It doesn't take much creativity to scare people into action. Yet, our goal is not to push them to a confrontational behavioral response, to run for the hills or to immobilize them. Anyone can sit on their tail in a position of power, presenting edicts with accompanying punishments for nonconformance. Inspiring discretionary effort, on the other hand, requires using your head.

"Beatings will continue until morale improves." This famous anonymous quote is laughable and viewed as what other people do, not us. However, the practices that are employed by many great, caring organizations occasionally speak otherwise.

Most leaders that attempt to employ tools such as motivation and accountability to achieve organizational alignment toward a goal, do so with honorable intentions. The Scottish poet, Robert Burns,

said it best, "The best laid schemes of mice and men go often askew."

The responsibility of leading people and accomplishing transformational results is difficult, as is the performance interface between them. Managing performance is an activity as old as the first appointed leader. It is necessary, however, due to the complexity of aligning individual and group behaviors toward organizational objectives. Occasionally, there are behaviors that are unacceptable or flagrant in nature. It is common to conclude that discipline is the only obvious answer.

Nonprofit organizations can teach the rest of the business community much about motivation. When the majority of your work is performed by inspired volunteers, it takes creative leadership to stimulate people to give their discretionary time or resources; discipline is a very ineffective motivator. What if we could no longer discipline employees?

In the groundbreaking book, "Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step," Edward de Bono proposed a new indirect and creative approach to problem solving. He

hypothesized, "Our traditional methods of thinking teach us how to refine such patterns and establish their validity. But we shall always make less than the best use of available information unless we know how to create new patterns and escape from the dominance of the old ones."

If you have reached a plateau in your organizational performance, and you recognize the next gains will result from discretionary employee participation, you are not alone. This is the quest of many. Fortunately, an approach that will result in a significant improvement in performance and culture is surprisingly simple. It begins with a question: "If we can't discipline, how do we motivate?"

Lead a lateral-thought exercise workshop focused on increasing employees' intrinsic motivation to improve performance. Present the following hypothetical position statement: OSHA (or supplement with other relevant government agency) will now levy an immediate fine of \$1 million for disciplining any employee for a safety-related offense. Now, how do we get employees motivated to follow rules

and provide discretionary effort to improve company and individual safety performance?

An inspired passion for excellence is the only thing that will ensure continued performance gains. Until we discover this, we will be limited in our ability to achieve performance excellence. I have been honored to observe significant transformations resulting from this thought-exercise and I encourage you to lead your own. Witnessing epiphanies that occur in each of my workshops gives me hope for the future of organizational motivation.

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