

MOTIVATION

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I. THE MEANING OF MOTIVATION

Introduction

1 It was a shock to discover how little the dictionary says about "motivation". There's a respectable amount about "motive" as "a need or desire that causes a person to act", but the noun "motivation" seems to be a peculiarly management term. The Thesaurus offers little more - likening "motive" to "stimulus, goad, catalyst, impetus, impulse, or spur." But the language books rightfully follow usage, and "motivation" is only recently coming to the fore along with business attention to managing the human factor, to human resource development, and to matters of personnel. Perhaps for the sake of discussion, we might understand the term "motivation" to refer to actions which assist people to perform their jobs with enthusiasm.

2 In thinking about motivation, there are two counsels of despair (truisms with enough error to make action futile, and so de-motivating to the highest degree):

3 1) HYPE ALONE WORKS - SORT OF. This is the assumption at the heart of most advertising - promotions, the bandwagon effect, associational thinking, etc., but even its most avid practitioners recognize the limits of festivities. The "Game World" created by "motivational" gimmickery is fun, challenging, competitive, and creative - for a while. But the real world of family, health, social evils, financial concerns etc., inevitably devastates even the most complex and sophisticated "game show" lifestyle.

4 2) YOU CANNOT MOTIVATE ANYONE. REAL MOTIVATION COMES FROM INSIDE. This is a true statement, and is well expressed by Peters and Austin in their superb PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE. It's corollary, however, is NOT "Nothing can be done about motivation"; nor is it "all you can do is to hire motivated people". Indeed, the whole of the book is a documentation of

how sensitive companies DO provide an atmosphere and structures that call forth commitment and creativity. These thoughts are an attempt to understand and to apply the reality they discovered.

A. THE FEEL OF MOTIVATION

5 "Every piece of stone you pick up is different, the grain's a little different and this and that. It'll split one day and break the other. You pick up your stone and look at it and make an educated guess. It's a pretty good day layin' stone or brick. Not tiring. Anything you like to do isn't tiresome. It's hard work; stone is heavy. At the same time you get interested in what you're doing and you usually fight the clock the other way. You're not lookin' for quittin'. You're wondering you haven't got enough done and it's almost quittin' time. (Laughs) I ask the hod carrier what time it is and he says two-thirty. I say 'Oh my Lord, I was gonna get a whole lot more than this.'

"Stone's my life. I daydream all the time, most times it's on stone. Oh, I'm gonna build me a stone cabin down on the Green River. I'm gonna build stone cabinets in the kitchen. That stone door's gonna be awful heavy and I don't know how to attach the hinges. I've got to figure out how to make a stone roof. That's the kind of thing. All my dreams, it seems like it's got to have a piece of rock mixed in it...

"I can't imagine a job where you go home and maybe go by a year later and you don't know what you've done. My work, I can see what I did the

first day I started. All my work is set right out there in the open and I can look at it as I go by. It's something I can see for the rest of my life. Forty years ago, the first blocks I ever laid in my life, when I was seventeen years old. I never go through that little town on the river that I don't look thataway. It's always there."

"The Stonecutter", WORKING by Studs Terkel

The book WORKING by Studs Terkel is a magnificent chronicle of human relations to the job. The stonecutter embodies a relation we'd all recognise as motivated. So also does Rambo, Sister Theresa, "Buck" Rogers, The A Team and Leontyne Price. Motivation is value-free; it is an enthusiasm for and creative engagement in what you are doing. It transforms drudgery into fun, routine into adventure, crisis into challenge.

Consider your own times of intense motivation. Recall the feel of enthusiasm, excitement and willingness - the seemingly outrageous things you were able to do without regret: staying up all night, risking life and limb, pouring through library volumes, performing amazing physical feats. And why? Because we were motivated. Something in the external environment had touched a nerve (of love, hate, desire, curiosity, fear) and we could not stop. No one was forcing us - but the conditions were such that we were driven from within.

The question of motivation is how to release that state. No one can force it on to another; but there are ways to encourage its appearance and to create an environment that fosters this inner drive.

Motivation is energy. All of us have it; even the most laggardly is probably using immense amounts of it to stifle its manifestation, like holding the lid on to a pressure-cooker. This is a prescription for an explosion, and we've all encountered the

surprising blasts from people who appeared calm to the point of apathy.

Everyone has the energy that is motivation-potential. The question of management is how to create an environment where it is released.

B. MOTIVATION'S LEVELS

MOTIVATION IS NOT MAGIC - BUT IT'S NOT SCIENCE EITHER. Laslow's Hierarchy of Needs has provided a useful guideline to human drives for many years. But we've reached a position in which most societies already surpass his first several levels (food, shelter, clothing, etc.). And his uppermost levels of self-esteem etc. seem inadequately developed to support the emerging art of motivation. As usual, the science is struggling to keep up with the practice; these pages are an effort to make sense of what is working in practice and to offer some indications into the directions for an adequate theoretical basis.

Motivation has four phases or levels, none of which is superior to the others and all of which are present in a given situation: **SHORT-TERM MOTIVATION; MID-TERM COMMITMENT; LONG-TERM INTEGRITY; LIFE-LONG VOCATION.** Each has its unique focus, its gut-level issue and its appropriate response. They are important to distinguish - otherwise one may get into the managerial equivalent of treating cancer with band-aids (or splinters with chemotherapy). **Effective motivation requires attention at all levels.** It's as simple as that.

II. THE FOUR LEVELS OF MOTIVATION

A. SHORT-TERM MOTIVATION

Short-term motivation has to do with a specific, immediate task - getting it accomplished with excellence. It may be as specific as an assembly line function or as complex as preparing an audit or organising a sales campaign. In every case, the question is how to **SUCCEED**, to get the task done correctly and effectively. It can be argued that **EVERY** job boils down to specific, short-term tasks, and this may be why the "hoopla approach", appropriate at this level,

has been taken for the whole of the matter. It is not.

14 In terms of short-term motivation - getting a job done immediately with flair - nothing works better than pizzaz. The "carrot-and-stick" approach wins here, with rewards for superior performance and punishments for the inferior. The feel of a game is the intent, and focus on gimmicks is a key. This is the "Tom Sawyer" approach. In the story young Tom, himself under a short-term threat from Aunt Polly, got his friends "motivated" to whitewash a fence by making it seem such great fun as to be irresistible.

15 Making the task seem fun - a game to be played - not too serious - a challenge with rewards for the successful: that is the essence of motivation at this level. Managers frequently miss opportunities at this level by presenting the task in the guise of a funeral rather than a circus:

"I know you don't want to do this, but we've got to _____, or else! So let's buckle down and do our best."

Who wants to work in that environment?!

An alternative might be:

"Look! We've got a challenge. Team X has bet us a beer party that they can _____ better (sooner, more) than we can. Let's show 'em who's really on top!"

16 SUCCESS Magazine in its October 1986 issue describes a dazzling array of gimmicks managers are currently using to provide motivation: it's subtitled "Managers Are Motivating Employees With Everything From Feasts to Fire Walking." "Today's now motivational tools," it reads, "include champagne, beer, pizza, biscuits, box seats and The Birthday Song." According to one manager, "You know you're a good motivator when you can't separate it from anything else you do in the office... This should be every manager's job..."

17 This approach will work for a while. We will do remarkable things for the promise of a bonus or a prize - or to avoid a threat. But not for too long. The glitter fades, the contest drags on and on, the prize loses its attraction, the threat its fear. One manager put it this way: "I tried incentives. I gave 'em cars and even boats. And all they wanted to do was to go driving or fishing!" When the incentives outshine the task, they run the risk of becoming counter-productive.

18 On the other hand, I can remember an occasion when a team was assigned a particularly onerous task - preparing and cleaning up after a company barbecue - and they did it with flair. From someone's fertile imagination, they decided on working around a theme of "Robin Hood and his Merry Men", and each dressed and acted appropriately. Arguably, they had more fun than the rest of us.

19 One can only admire and encourage the energy spent in competition for bonuses, the overtime in pursuit of prizes and the effort avoiding reprimands. Human beings need a pleasure to pursue; if it is not attached to the immediate task, it will be attached to something else and the task will suffer.

20 Short-term motivation is a crucial dynamic in business; the creativity in this arena has transformed the whole notion of work from dread to pleasure. But it is not the whole story.

B. MID-TERM COMMITMENT

21 Mid-term commitment refers to the on-going job: how to keep on keeping on. What is it that enables organisations to persist and employees to endure? How does one prevent the inevitable disillusionment with one's role from de-stabilising the entire company? Any organisation requires a certain degree of structure and predictability: how can commitment and responsibility be elicited from the people?

"Ownership is a psychological condition, not merely a legal one...the condition in which the individual feels that his or her own well-

being is tied to that of the organisation....in which the employee believes in the interdependency between the self and the organisation....this is the unity that we should be seeking." (L. A. Miller)"

22 The key to mid-term (job) commitment is to touch the sense of belonging.

23 In today's society, an awareness of unity with others has emerged, and with it a drive for the social expression of belonging. In mass society and complex organisations, **people crave recognition**. One of the greatest fears today is seeing oneself as a machine part which, when removed, does not affect the machine's operation. The traditional African greeting, "I see you" is a perfect expression of the notice we all find so desirable.

24 PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE describes in great detail how "people who OWN their jobs regularly perform thousands of times better than people who do not." MEGATRENDS describes the way people band together more as technology advances. Quality Circles succeed because they give people a sense of belonging and recognition as well as a vehicle for participation and responsibility.

25 We are rapidly discovering that the hierarchical imagery of corporate organisation no longer works. The "boss" is replaced by the "team leader" as a management image. The "father-figure", even when benevolent, requires "children" - and people today in the work force are adults. The issue is how to keep the organisation going, and the answer is to give that task to everyone. People will respond to genuine responsibility, just as we will be demeaned by the lack of it.

26 Vehicles of genuine participation are rare but powerful means of motivation. The workshop, the brainstorm, the conversation, the meeting - all can be used to allow genuine responsibility and belonging to emerge. They can also stifle it when used to manipulate agreement to a pre-established decision.

27 Astounding feats of creativity are regularly

performed by people who understand themselves to "own" their task, to have a say in how it's done, and to belong authentically to the organisation.

28 Many groups have "Employee-of-the-Month" awards. Whether a bonus or a recognition, the award communicates to people that they are noticed and that their contribution matters. Participatory decision-making is gaining ascendancy, and when it works, commitment ensues.

"At Autodesk, respect for employees starts with honesty. John Walker, president and one of the founders of the Sausalito, California-based firm, holds monthly state-of-the-company meetings over beer, champagne and pizza. All 250 employees are welcome at these sessions, and Walker discusses almost every line in the company's balance sheet. This talk of facts and figures does not bore the employees in the least. "In fact, the meetings got so crowded that people spilled out of the conference room into the hall. John had to call them to order with a bull-horn," says Mauri Laitenen, who works in quality-control at Autodesk. The "openness and good humour" make the company a pleasure to work for, Laitenen explains."

"Beyond the Carrot and the Stick",
Mark B. Roman.

- SUCCESS magazine, October 1986

29 But what about people who can't or won't perform adequately? How can they come to have responsibility and job ownership? The team dynamic can often provide an answer. For the team brings "belonging" to the most particular level. Someone in a team having difficulty in meeting performance standards can call on peers for help - and can be pressed by peers to

shape up. Their efforts - or lack of them - affect the whole team, and this is visible to the employee. The responsibility is very obvious, and some refuse it. Some people prefer 9-to-5 clock-punching. When they find the job requires more, they may leave. The manager may have to decide when to encourage their departure because one laggard can destroy the morale of an entire team.

30 COMMITMENT and responsibility cannot be demanded - but they CAN be elicited. The trick is REALLY to treat people as responsible and provide means of participation. Results follow.

31 Participation, belonging, and responsibility are factors crucial to mid-range job commitment. But aren't they also prescriptions for burn-out? What happens when someone wears out on the job and its attendant responsibilities? After you "keep on keeping on" for 10-15 years, what is there to look forward to?

C. LONG TERM INTEGRITY

32 "The love of and devotion to product or service leads to integrity. The manager who has a genuine love of automobiles is more likely to sell finer automobiles than the manager who is simply interested in making money."

Miller:

VISIONS OF A NEW CORPORATE CULTURE, p.44.

33 Long-term integrity is related to one's PROFESSION. If short-term motivation concerns getting a task done, and mid-term commitment has to do with organisational continuity, long-term motivation is related to WHAT one is doing. Whether secretary, custodian, manager, or CEO, each of us occasionally faces the question. "What am I doing? Amidst all the options, why THIS?" It's a question both of purpose and of skill.

34 This is the question of burn out, and for the person wrestling with it, every function performed is

a burden. Attempts to engage this person in task hoopla or organisational participation are met with blank stares, resigned plodding or cynical rebuffs. The fun has gone out of the work, and each effort requires a new act of will power.

35 Sustaining motivation at this level requires attention to the question of "what business are we really in?" As demonstrated by Naisbitt in MEGATRENDS, one's answer to this question either opens or closes the future. For the corporation, responses provide future directions (railways are really in the transportation business; hotels in the event business, etc.) that get around sunset markets. For the individual, the answer to "what business are you really in?" is a statement of integrity.

"Each business in our society, whether making steel, farming potatoes, producing cars or processing information, each in it's own way contributes to this purpose of creating wealth--goods and services. Wemust communicate it to our managers and workers so that they may have the satisfaction of sacrificing their energies to that which enhances their own dignity. This is the first priority of business leadership in the new age.

Miller:

VISIONS OF A NEW CORPORATE CULTURE

36 In the time of multiple value systems and various cultures in cross proximity people are looking for a place to stand, some values to uphold. If the job can be defined with sufficient depth, one can stake his integrity on it. If, however, the position is trivialised, then one can only hold it in contempt (and oneself, for doing a trivial job.) What is coming increasingly clear, however, is that NO JOB IS TRIVIAL. So complex and interrelated is our society that no function is worthless; every position

contributes to the whole. Grasping that relationship is a vehicle for professional integrity.

37 It comes down to this: are you cleaning toilets or are you maintaining a healthy working environment? Are you running a business or are you providing a service to customers? Are you typing forms or are you keeping track of records that will make future decisions possible? Are you selling widgets or are you making technology available to a particular clientele?

38 It depends on how you look at it. But that's the point: looked at one way, the job is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Looked at differently, it is worth all I have to give it. So the trick is to present the job in a way that discloses its inherent values. And to provide conditions for that value to be apparent to the jobholder.

39 Then there is the second aspect of professional skill. When one values the work, one takes pride in doing it well. And one finds a collegiality with other people doing similar work in other organisations. Professional societies develop in order to enhance this pride of profession and to provide opportunities for expertise development. Being with people in similar jobs in an occasion to "share approaches that work," to brag about one's own accomplishments and to learn from the mistakes of others.

40 It is a chance to see one's work as part of a larger framework than that of the particular organisation that pays the salary. To be able to say "I belong to the guild of writers (or to the union of carpenters, or to the bar association, or the chamber of commerce, or the secretaries society)" gives one a posture of dignity and expertise that makes sense of years of expenditure. It's very motivating.

41 The professional societies began in the Middle Ages as "Guilds", and their function was to provide the social framework for skill development. We do not have comparable associations today, but the dynamics are present in seminars and conferences that move beyond the company.

42 Attention to the corporate culture and definition of the "business we are in" are factors that will sustain responsible participation in the work of the organisation. Ignoring these elements will contribute to employee burnout.

D. LIFE-LONG VOCATION

43a "Once, I visited a meat packing plant that made sausages. I listened in awe as the manager of the plant explained to me how more people in the South woke up each morning to eat that company's brand of sausages than any other kind. He actually described for me his conviction that the quality of their sausages helped all those people enjoy the rest of the day. He truly believed it. He believed that the work he was doing was for a noble purpose. He was helping millions of people have a good day! All of the plant's managers and workers are motivated by their own thoughts. They think about the good they are doing, the pride in being the best, the satisfaction of leading a change in life-style or making the best sausages in the world. They have purpose, and this purpose leads to productivity and satisfaction." - Miller, p. 27.

43b "The search for meaning and significance is a central characteristic of the human soul. Every person would like to find meaning and significance in his or her work. How many organisations provide this opportunity? The degree to which an organisation is perceived to be in pursuit of and is acting consistent with noble ideals is the degree to

which it is possible for the individual to believe that his or her efforts will be personally meaningful and significant. It is this spiritual deficiency in the culture of our corporations that we must address."

Miller, p. xxi.

43c

"It is my experience and the experience of other observers that managers who inspire devotion have a dedication to a higher, sometimes mysterious, perhaps spiritual purpose. They believe in a cause, a reason, and a set of truths beyond their control and to which everything else must conform. These beliefs may be in God or religion, but it is always in a superior force or truth. It is the adherence to these to these beliefs and the mission to carry them forward that provides an internal security that allows them to behave with a sense of special significance, which is the key to their leadership. They know that they are not merely serving themselves, a goal for which they know little is worth sacrificing--but that they are serving their cause, mission or faith, for which great sacrifices are justified. Employees have an unspoken sensitivity to this spiritual significance, and respond in a way that results in meaning within their own lives... O. A. Ohmann has referred to these higher values as "skyhooks".

Miller, p. 147f.

43d

"Perhaps the most important management-development task that our cor-

porations face is to create a cultural learning process that teaches young managers to act on superior belief systems, to do that which they know to be right, according to a higher standard than what seems to be most expedient.

43e

"The response to higher standards implies sacrifice. Sacrifice of short-term appearances, numbers, or gain. However there is a great mystery to genuine sacrifice. When we sacrifice for a noble cause, strangely we find there has been no sacrifice. We become more worthy having made the sacrifice. And it is not long before that achievement produces the most attractive return on investment. The manager who is able to respond with integrity will inspire confidence, performance and dedication -- the stuff of which success is made."

Miller, p. 149f.

44

The depth of motivation at any level has to do with one's vocation - what one is doing with one's life. What one is doing with one's life is almost never wholly contained in the job. It is the RELATIONSHIP between the job and vocation that is crucial for motivation.

45

The job needs to be seen as a MEANS OF CARRYING OUT ONE'S VOCATION. And the company philosophy and values need to be expressed in a way that makes it possible. The story of the sausage factory cited above is a good example of an organisation that allowed workers to accomplish their vocational purpose of helping millions of people.

46

At the heart of motivation is a more or less conscious decision about the significance of one's life. A job - however lofty its function - can never exhaust that significance. However, a job that is

aligned with one's vocation will inspire considerably more enthusiasm than one which is tangential.

47 The philosophy of a company and its mission statement are capable of expressing noble aims and eliciting high performance. Company logos, slogans and even rituals can serve as useful reminders. They certainly shape the motivational environment that will lend either positive or negative significance to the work.

48 Vocation, finally, is an individual matter. A company can only be a vehicle for a person's own life mission - but the company can acknowledge that fact and give due credit to its contribution to the human enterprise.

49 People are responsible for their own vocation and therefore their own motivation. An enormous variety of tools have been invented to deal with this dimension - from physical exercise to reading, meditation, hobbies, volunteer work, journal writing and religious practices. Self-help programmes abound for virtually every temperament.

50 Because "skyhooks" have a way of coming "unstuck", people need regular reinforcement of their chosen mission - a way to step back from the trees and view the forest. Organisations need to find ways to encourage, support and reinforce this dimension of life.

51 Symbols of the values, mission and significance of the organisation's work will create a climate that fosters lives committed to acting with excellence.

52 If these, then, are the levels of motivation, operative in each of us all the time, then what is the CONTEXT of the environment that elicits internal motivation? Factors that must be considered include the TASK, the TEAM, the TIME, the SPACE and the STORY. These are subjects for the next chapter.

The three aspirations which
are characteristic of a
faith in the future;

a passion for the

future

a passion for the

universal

and a passion for the

individual

Chardin