



## Management and Performance Associates – January 2008

### Motivated or Committed? That is the question ...

***“We know nothing about motivation. All we can do is write books about it.” Peter Drucker***

One of the most popular comments during our leadership workshops is: ***“My team is demotivated. What can I do to motivate them?”*** The short answer: ***NOTHING!*** Ultimately, there is nothing we can do to motivate other people since motivation is an internal drive related to our sources of energy; in other words: our wiring. Motivation emerges from our motives or our basic unconscious impulses and has to do with what gives us pleasure. Simply put: no pleasure, no motivation.

The concern for motivating others is also based on a false premise: we cannot know if someone else is motivated or not, since motivation cannot be seen. The only thing that can be observed is other people’s behaviors. If their behaviors reveal enthusiasm, satisfaction and/or pleasure, then probably the person is motivated for performing that specific task.

As mentioned by Drucker, several books have been written about the topic. In the corporate world, one of the most respected motivation theories is the one developed by David McClelland. His theory states that people are motivated by three sources of energy. None is better than the other, and we all have—in different dosages—a little of each, although one or two of the motives are usually higher than the others. They are: **Achievement** (our orientation to challenges), **Affiliation** (our orientation to establishing interpersonal relationships) and **Power** (our orientation to influencing and impacting others).

McClelland concludes that “power is the great motivator” so, in order to be successful in complex organizations both managers and leaders need to be motivated by power. Obviously we are not talking about a dictatorial impulse but about the pleasure of influencing and positively impacting the team and generating short and long term results. Another recent study revealed the fact that lately

most corporate leaders are motivated by achievement. The fight to get results, regardless of their costs, supports this finding. This does not necessarily mean that they are leaders who enjoy their managerial function or that they are appreciated by their staff.

Another topic of concern to most managers is ***“employee engagement,”*** a concept that encompasses constant motivation and passion, commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by employees. Now, back to the question of what we can do about it, the short answer is: ***A LOT!*** Here are some ideas:

**1. Know the people that work for you.** The only way to do this is by talking to them and asking them about their motivations, observing their “good” and “bad” behaviors and validating your observations with them. Don’t wait for the small talk during a farewell party to realize that your employee is also a musician, an actor or a painter. You had 10 years to figure out what their motivation was.

**2. Know their expectations.** The fact that this person is your right hand has nothing to do with what this person wants, wishes and/or expects from the organization. Help people align their tasks to their sources of motivation.

**3. Make their jobs exciting and interesting.** Easier to do for some jobs, but this rule also applies for employees performing basic and repetitive tasks. How? Let them understand the context and reasons for the task at hand; connect their tasks to corporate goals, so they will understand how their “little task” contributes to the company’s mission and vision.

**4. Help people in their development—recognizing their strengths and working on their development areas.** The key word here is feedback: constant, timely and based on observable facts which have impacted performance, either positively or negatively. Especially when discussing their improvement areas, do not tell them what to do.



Instead, ask them what they can do differently next time.

**5. Listen.** Create a culture where people feel free to ask for help and talk about their needs.

As you may have noticed, these five actions require a constant and open dialogue with your staff members. Most of us have room for improvement and this improvement can make a difference.

**See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.**

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