

What Motivates? It May Not Be What You Think

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If you're still relying on the classic Carrot and Stick Formula alone to motivate, welcome to the world of the dinosaur. Though it's been the standard by which organizations (and parents) have generally attempted to drive results, providing a reward for desired behaviors and outcomes and a punishment for unwanted ones doesn't always work. Here's why: a one-dimensional reward system, generally based on monetary rewards, fails to take in people's intrinsic motivators.

Though money is often assumed to be the most effective motivator, financial rewards are not enough to create an engaged, committed workforce. Ted has been one of the top producers in an investment management firm. For every account he brings in, Ted receives a commission and handsome year-end bonuses based on sales growth. Ted has never earned a buck he didn't love to see in his bank account but, beyond a fair compensation level and a comfortable lifestyle, it's not about the money. His deeper reward, the motivating internal driver, is winning and being seen as successful.

Carol has a different intrinsic motivator. She's recently left a corporate career and taken a salary cut to become Director of Development for a nonprofit. She's part of an organization whose mission she fervently believes in, and the small leadership team she's a part of gives her far greater opportunity to influence direction and decisions. For Carol, it's about leading and making meaning through her work.

For us to motivate others as well as ourselves, we have to tap into the sources of personal fulfillment, recognizing that one size doesn't fit all. I'm hearing from more and more people who are dissatisfied in their current positions that the compensation carrot is not the primary issue. Here are some of the things they say would be motivating to them:

"I want opportunities for professional growth."

"Ask me for my ideas. Use my experience."

"I haven't received a word of acknowledgement in weeks. Let me know I'm valued."

"I want to know that our products or services make a difference in people's lives."

"Give me flexibility so I can make a meaningful contribution without neglecting my role as a parent."

"Let me know you trust me. Delegate responsibility and let me run with it."

In his new book, [Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us](#), author Dan Pink confirms that people are motivated by three primary desires. The first is *autonomy*, the ability to be self-directed. Next is *mastery*, the opportunity to become really good at something. That's why you see busy professionals training for triathlons or registering for professional development programs and advanced training. Challenge is a part of mastery. Finally, people are motivated by *purpose*, the need to feel that their work matters in some essential way. Unless business profits are aligned with a higher purpose, people become demotivated.

To motivate others, we need to understand what they value. The best way to find out is to ask questions like:

- "What makes you feel good at work?"
- "What's missing for you at work?"
- "How do you think we could be doing things better?"

To motivate yourself, try this. (It works best if you do it in writing.)

- Set a specific, measurable goal.
- Assess what's important to you about achieving it. What will be different and better? What significant needs and values will be fulfilled? What will that give you?
- How will you feel a year from now if you've made no progress?

If you're not committed to the goal after this, chances are you've picked the wrong goal or it isn't important enough to you right now to propel you into action.