



## *The Mysteries of Motivation*

*There is a lot more to motivation than the fabled carrot and stick, especially at a time when workers have become more assertive. In thinking about how to motivate the people of today, a few concepts out of the past might not go amiss . . .*

□ Motivation is a word that is commonly associated with big business, mainly because the management scientists who deal in the subject are usually employed or consulted by large corporations. This is regrettable in that it tends to blur recognition of a force that has a profound influence on the internal workings of organizations of all kinds from the United Nations to the corner store. Whether in a business big or small, a school, or an association, anyone who is responsible for other people's efforts must grapple with the intricacies of motivation. Therefore anyone who is, or aspires to be, responsible for other people's work should seek a basic understanding of what it is all about.

On the surface, it could hardly be simpler. To motivate people, the dictionaries tell us, is to cause them to act in a certain way. This is done by furnishing them with a motive to do your bidding. By the strictest definition, the most elementary form of motivation would be if a hold-up man were to stick a pistol in your face and growl: "Your money or your life." He instantly arouses a motive in you for doing what he wants you to — the motive of staying alive.

But motivation, in the popular understanding of the term, is usually a more long-lasting condition. You might, for example, train a puppy by motivating it to avoid a smack. Children will learn that "being bad" in the eyes of their parents will provoke a spanking, while "being good" will get them a treat of some sort. The parents have instilled in

them the dual motive of avoiding punishment and earning rewards.

In the lexicon of management science, the system of reward and punishment is known as the "carrot-and-stick" approach, the carrot being dangled in front of a donkey's nose and the stick applied smartly to his hindquarters. In this fashion he is alternately enticed and impelled towards his master's goal. Whether the donkey ever gets to eat the carrot in this analogy is not made clear in management literature. We can be sure, however, that he gets to feel the stick.

The carrot and stick were traditionally cited as the prime motivators of the "economic man", a mythical creature much used and abused by classical economists to further their theories of human dynamics. "The beauty of the economic man was that we knew exactly what he was after," the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once wistfully wrote. He was a timorous specimen, terrified of taking a chance on being deprived of a living. At the same time he was instinctively greedy, forever grasping for as much money and property as he could possibly acquire.

In 1939 Peter Drucker, who has been hailed as the father of modern management science, published a book called *The End of Economic Man*, stating that economic self-interest was never as mighty a force in human affairs as the classical economists imagined. "We know nothing about motivation. All we can do is write books about it,"

the same Dr. Drucker recently said. This may be stretching a point to the limit, but Drucker's message is essentially valid. It emphasizes just how complex and inscrutable are the motives of the real flesh-and-blood man and woman working today.

The modern worker clearly is motivated by much more than the carrot of pay and advancement and the stick of discipline and insecurity, although it would be foolish to underestimate the continuing effectiveness of these devices. Money might not be everything — otherwise movie stars would be the happiest people on earth — but there is no evidence that the mass of humanity has ceased to have a strong desire for the comfort and possessions that money will buy. The "stick", at the very least, is what makes us get up in the morning and go to work even when we don't much feel like it. It is part of normal human nature to steer clear of trouble and to want the assurance of a steady, well-paid job.

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### *Low-level motivators equal low-level effort*

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Many management experts, however, classify job and financial security as "low-level" motivators which guarantee no more than low-level effort. "To get people to do mediocre work, one need only *drive them*, using coercive and reward power in a manipulative way," writes James J. Cribben in his book *Effective Managerial Leadership*, published by the American Management Association in 1971. "To elicit their top performance, one must get them to *drive themselves* . . ."

From this statement it is clear that the function of motivation in modern management is to move workers to perform at the very peak of their abilities. Hence a conscientious manager should concentrate on creating and maintaining a psychological climate which enables people to do their level best.

As the title of Dr. Cribben's book implies, this can only be done through leadership. A leader is able to draw forth a willing effort from his followers and make them want to do their utmost for

him. The antithesis of leadership is dictatorship, in which an unwilling effort is forced out of people by the crude application of power. An involuntary effort is likely to be less effective than one given voluntarily. And it should be borne in mind that dictatorships invariably produce rebels devoted to their demise.

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### *It's not the satisfaction that drives, but the desire*

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Theories abound about how leaders should go about getting people to drive themselves, but no one disputes the fundamental notion that "high-level" motivation resulting in high-level performance must come from within an individual. It is the sum of a person's aspirations, values, self-esteem and sensibilities. So it is a person's own property, to be given or withheld depending on how he or she feels about a job.

It can, however, be given unconsciously if working conditions correspond with the needs that dwell within a person's psyche. In his classic work *Motivation and Personality*, A. H. Maslow divided the range of a normal person's needs into five broad categories which have to do with basic creature comfort, security, the social instinct, ego gratification, and living up to one's image of oneself. Maslow pointed out that the satisfaction of these needs should not be mistaken for motivation; rather it is the drive to obtain or sustain the satisfaction. When you consider that some of the most dedicated people in history have been motivated by storing up rewards in heaven, you can see his point.

The first three categories are easy enough to understand. People naturally want the necessities of life; they want comfortable and secure working conditions and fair compensation; they want to feel that they belong to a group of supportive people and be part of something bigger than themselves.

The needs that come under the heading of ego gratification are more difficult to fathom. They involve a desire for recognition, status, and opportunities to demonstrate extraordinary competence. In practice these needs may not be readily apparent to the individual worker's boss.

A person's "self-actualization" needs may also be overlooked: these call for challenges to one's abilities, opportunities to exercise creativity, and a degree of personal autonomy. Obviously, neither these nor ego gratification needs can be met exclusively within the working environment. Still, they can have a strong effect for good or ill on a person's attitude towards a job.

No one has an entirely equal complement of Maslow's five varieties of needs. Whether a worker cares more about money than ego gratification, or more about self-expression than creature comforts, depends very largely on his or her temperament and background. Also, the intensity of one need or another within an individual will vary according to circumstances. To take the plainest example, people become more preoccupied with security as they grow older.

All of which means that any attempt to motivate a person to do his or her best work must be tailor-made to the needs of the individual personality. Because of this, the person most responsible for a person's motivation on the job is his or her immediate boss.

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### *When people motivate each other, the working climate becomes ideal*

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The top management of an organization can go some way towards meeting creature comfort and security needs, and in offering incentives for good performance. But the more private and particular elements of motivation must be dealt with on a personal level between the superior and subordinate day-by-day.

Some managers and supervisors will draw the line at this point, protesting that they are not psychiatrists or wet nurses, and that they have far more practical and pressing matters to worry about. But the fact is that they cannot escape the influence of motivation, or of its opposite, demotivation. The motivation of each individual in a work team is what goes to make up its morale — and bad morale can spell grief to the leader of any team.

The results of surveys of workers' attitudes in recent years underline the importance of motivation on the ground level. They show that present-

day employees place a strong emphasis on challenge, opportunity, and recognition of performance; and that they are more willing than their counterparts of a generation ago to quit a job that does not offer these things. An old-line manager or supervisor might write them off as spoiled brats or prima donnas. But by failing to take account of their personal priorities, he or she could very well have to live with the consequences of a high turnover, which include having to function on a more or less permanent basis with a half-trained staff.

On the other hand, bosses who make a serious effort to understand their subordinates become better-motivated themselves, because they come closer to fulfilling their own ego and self-expression needs in the process. Motivation must, in fact, work two ways, because superiors must be open to their subordinates' influence if they expect the subordinates to be open to theirs. The cross-motivation that comes from healthy superior-subordinate relationships gives rise to an ideal working climate, not only for the people directly concerned, but for the organization as a whole.

In other words, cross-motivation keeps everybody happy. And when we get right down to the core of the matter, that is what motivation is all about. The philosopher William James identified its nucleus long before the term ever entered the vocabulary. He wrote: "If we were to ask the question, 'What is life's chief concern?' one of the answers we should receive would be: 'It is happiness.' How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness is in fact the secret motive of all we do, and all we are willing to endure."

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### *The boss's own happiness may depend on how his people feel*

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A line manager or foreman may consider it ridiculously beyond his purview to have to worry about whether the people working under him are happy or not. But in the long run — unless he is sadistic or masochistic or both — his own happiness in his job is bound to be affected by how they feel.

Only a positive effort to make them contented in their work will bring the kind of motivation that ensures he exceeds his objectives and boosts his organization's productivity. The most successful leaders are always those who pay most attention to the people who follow them. If a leader cares about what happens to his followers, his followers will care about what happens to him.

The shop floor or the office may not seem like the appropriate place to spread happiness, but work is certainly an element in the state of a person's emotions. Some people hate their jobs, and are to be pitied for it; most, however, are relatively satisfied with their work if only for the money it brings. Even people who regard work as a necessary evil will admit on close questioning that their work and all that is associated with it affords them a measure of happiness that they might not otherwise experience. Psychologists stress that work is a major source of self-esteem.

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### *The principles can be stated in simple, old-fashioned terms*

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If a person's work *per se* adds to his or her happiness, then the job in itself becomes the ultimate motivator. But for this to be so, the work must be valued, and recognized as such. For the manager or supervisor, this implies a continuing effort to accentuate the importance of what the subordinate is doing in the overall context of the organization. It is noteworthy in this regard that the most fiendish punishments the military mind can devise entail having a prisoner do something entirely useless, like scrubbing his cell floor with a toothbrush or painting a pile of rocks.

There are various ways to build motivation into a job which may be found in the voluminous literature on the subject. Anyone seriously interested in motivation should, of course, refer to the books that

have been written about it, which are too numerous to mention here. Writings on motivation tend to suffer from the professional jargon which psychologists and management experts employ in their attempts to be explicit. The principles can, however, be stated in quite ordinary old-fashioned terms.

First of all, motivation is a matter of human understanding — of the superior understanding the subordinate. If and when that state is achieved, it becomes a process of encouraging people to go as far as possible towards meeting their aspirations — in plainer language, their hopes and dreams. This requires giving them an opportunity to show what they can do. Their efforts must then be recognized and rewarded to the extent that this is possible within the system. They must be made to feel wanted within that system. This is done by making them aware of how their efforts contribute to the whole.

It comes down to treating people with respect for their individuality and consideration for their feelings. It means caring about others — about their personal well-being. It means giving them a chance to show what they can do even if that is sometimes inconvenient. It means encouraging and helping them to meet their full potential in their careers.

When you think about it, motivation is not much different from friendship. A friend attempts to understand you, and to help you as far as possible to achieve your aims. A friend is concerned about your happiness, and tries within the limits of his or her ability to make you happy. A friend is someone who supports you and knows that he or she can count on your support in return.

Above all, a friend is someone who will go out of his or her way to do things for you. The motive for this is nothing more than the knowledge that you would do the same for him or her. And so it is with mutual motivation in the plant or office. The bosses who are most concerned about their subordinates get the most out of them in the form of high-quality work.