

THE KEYS TO MOTIVATION

Mark Breslin

Are you in charge of anyone? Do you have any responsibility for management objectives, outcomes or profits? Does anyone working for or with you supervise, guide, mentor or lead others? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then I have a very simple question that should be easy for you to answer.

What are the top three performance motivators for people in the workplace?

Can you answer this quickly and accurately? If not, why not?

It is only the most important question one can ask, teach and utilize. But hey, I'm sure you have the answers correct. For all the other people not quite as on-the-ball as you, let's take a quick look.

According to national studies of workplace satisfaction, motivation and performance, the three key prime motivators are;

1. Recognition and praise
2. Participation in decision making
3. Money

So let's do a little check-in on our industry for these three factors. And why not a little reflection on your organization? And heck, while we're at it, how about your personal leadership motivation style?

Recognition and Praise

The construction industry is not touchy feely. Leadership "soft skills" in our industry would best be described as deficient or non-existent. I know because I was there too. Our industry is run on authority, ego, pride, attitude, swagger, aggressiveness and competition. And you can build a lot of jobs and make money doing it that way. Conversely, this approach seems to overlook the NUMBER ONE PRIME MOTIVATOR entirely. Recognition and praise are given grudgingly if at all.

I have a glass encased hand saw on the wall in my office. It was my grandfather's saw and he was (as was my great grandfather) a hard nosed Italian contractor. Inscribed next to the saw is his message of motivation summed up in one quote he used frequently on the jobsite. "Don't drink more water than you can sweat." In other words don't even think about stopping even to pee. This summarizes our industry in a nutshell. Field leaders pride themselves on being tough instead of perceptive or interactive. Thus the vast majority of our industry culture does not maximize the productivity, commitment and profit returns of recognizing individual and team performance. What to do?

1. *Coach field leaders, key lead-men and even apprentices on the necessity of providing positive feedback to subordinates and peers. Reward and recognize this behavior when you see it.*
2. *Note that recognition and praise are only effective when they are tied to a specific event or tangible effort or outcome. General non-specific praise or recognition has no impact on satisfaction or motivation*
3. *Be sincere. People can tell when you are doing it with an agenda.*
4. *Build a culture where this is not only centralized around one area (safety / production) but all areas that contribute to the organizations broad mission.*
5. *Do it yourself. Every day.*

Participation in Decision Making

Why even bother with this one when you and I know everything anyway? What a pain in the ass. Well the real lesson is; people want to feel a part of determining their own fate. Call it "buy-in". Call it alignment. Call it brainstorming. Call it a flat management structure. The label matters less than the practice. Hey, our business is generally not a democracy but it should not be a dictatorship. The net result of people being directed is that they do what they are directed to do. The net result of people doing what they are part of developing is seeing pride and a bigger macro picture of how their small part fits in terms of purpose and meaning. What to do?

1. *Solicit others opinions even when you think you know the answer.*
2. *Solicit others views even when you are impatient and listening to them feels frustrating. The respect you are granting is part of what motivates them.*
3. *Tell people why decisions are made. Give them an idea of how a decision contributes to the organizational mission; whether they like it or not. Weak leaders only give people this when news is good or where they can avoid the discomfort of discussing how it effects those down the chain of command.*
4. *Openly review mistakes. Others and your own. Not in a judgmental manner but in a way that encourages everyone to own their decisions and learn from each other. When this is not present some people will default to blaming, CYA or not providing information out of fear or a don't care view.*
5. *Participation in decision making is a key to increasing accountability.*

Money

When I ask most leaders what motivates people the first answer I get is money. But money is the default when the first two are not present. In the field in union construction money is a zero. In fact it can be a demotivator. In the system we have (that as a good capitalist makes no damn sense to me) the best and worst workers get about the same compensation. Maybe a guy gets over scale, but it does not make him or her work harder, it just retains them. They live in a culture where "fair" compensation does not always correlate to personal effort given. For apprentices this can be a very poisonous

environment; they work for years for less money than others that don't provide value at the high level required by union construction. What net motivational impact do you think that has by the time they become journeymen? What to do?

1. *Recognize that union wages though they may on the surface seem to be key motivators, are likely not. If everyone gets the same, you need to find other ways of motivating.*
2. *Give foremen, superintendents, trainers, instructors, office managers and everyone else positioned to influence others the resources and flexibility to reward people in non-monetary ways.*
3. *Remember that money is only number three and that if you work at Number One and Number Two hard enough, Number Three won't be such a challenge.*

Lastly, think about your personal style related to these simple but powerful motivational elements. I used to be a unpleasant person to work for. Results before people. Just give me the bottom line. Fifteen years ago a departing employee told me that in her three years of employment, it was never enjoyable working for me. I was surprised and a little blindsided. The organization was thriving and growing, increasing resources and by every measure of success doing very well. But I had used a hard edged construction kick butt and take names old school model that drove people and not motivated them. It had also about lived out its' usefulness as it wears people out quickly.

It took me a while to figure out, but right there, under my nose, was the real key to motivational success. From that point forward, I began a motivational culture change and I knew it had to start with me. The long term results? Transformational growth and success for the organization, and hopefully greater fulfillment for the people who shared in the achievement. And it was so damn simple as to be easy to miss. Involving and recognizing others, developing a more balanced leadership style and considering the true power of The Keys to Motivation.

Mark Breslin is a trainer and author specializing in labor-management challenges and solutions. He is the author of the recently published Attitudes and Behaviors: Survival of the Fittest curriculum for apprentice training centers. The curriculum is now being used by union training centers, and has been established as standard course programming by other International Unions and apprenticeship programs. Instructional material including books, CDs, workbooks, instructor guides and support media information is available at www.breslin.biz.