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The Secret to Employee Motivation

Today folks want things distilled to the simplest form. So, here now is the one-sentence secret to motivating employees to excellent job performance:

Make doing desired performance to be
MORE REWARDING than doing
undesired performance.

“Whoa,” you say, “it’s impossible for it to be that simple.” But it *is* that simple. This is the core dynamic to employee, or team member, motivation-building. Any activity, thing, condition, or program that results in getting a person to accomplish desired performance *does so* by making the execution of that desired performance to be *more rewarding* than the execution of undesired performance.

Here's why it works that way. Whenever a person faces a choice between two mutually-exclusive endeavors — such as doing desired performance versus not doing desired performance — the person always chooses to pursue whichever course of action appears to hold the *greater amount* of net reward for them. (We call this the *Law of Performance Choice*.) So, if it happens that not doing desired performance appears to hold the greater net reward, that's the alternative that gets pursued!

We now come to the pivotal question facing virtually every enterprise: *How* do we get employees to choose to pursue desired performance over undesired performance?

The answer is: We do it by *increasing the net reward of desired performance*, as employees perceive it. And how do we do that? It's in the upside versus downside of each endeavor.

Every performance holds an upside and a downside for the performer. The **upside** is whatever a performer *likes* about doing the particular performance. The **downside** is whatever the performer *dislikes* about doing it.

The *upside* can take the form of a compensation, event, communication, condition, situation, and/or opportunity that the performer finds enjoyable, beneficial, or fulfilling. It can be an aspect of the performance itself or it can be something received afterward as a result of doing the performance.

The *downside* is anything the performer must either painfully endure or reluctantly give up in order to accomplish the performance. Things that a performer might have to *endure* include difficulties, frustration, physical discomfort, psychological discomfort, fatigue, boredom, risk, and inconvenience (or hassle) involved in doing the performance. Things that a performer might have to *give up* or relinquish in order to engage in the per-

formance include personal energy and resources and the opportunity to do something else instead.

Virtually every performance carries both an upside and a downside. So, associated with each endeavor or performance is a formula. We call it the *Net Reward Formula*, and it reads like this:

Upside – Downside = Net Reward
of the performance (for the performer)

So, the way you go about increasing the net reward of desired performance is: **(a)** expand the upside and/or **(b)** shrink the downside of doing desired performance (as viewed through the eye of the performer).

Expanded Upside and/or Shrunken Downside =
GREATER NET REWARD of the Performance

You accomplish this vital process through doing these two steps:

Step 1: FIND OUT what types of performance-related experiences employees like and dislike.

Step 2: INFUSE desired performance with a *greater* quantity of the experiences that employees like and with a *lesser* quantity of experiences they dislike.

These two steps are the essence of employee motivation-building. Or, put another way, they're *The 2-step Motivation-building Process*.

So how do you do Step 1, or go about finding out what types of experiences make doing desired performance more rewarding for employees? You can do it one or both of two ways: (1) You can ask them and (2) you can use trial-and-error. In the second way, you guess at what employees might like or want, then provide that thing either as *part of doing* desired performance or as a *consequence for accomplishing* desired performance (but not

for undesired performance). Then you observe the results. If it increases the frequency or intensity with which employees pursue desired performance, you've found something they like. If it doesn't, it's probably not something they like.

It's easy to guess at what to try because most humans have the same basic desires. That is, most of us want:

- To engage in enjoyable activity (and avoid uncomfortable activity).
- To feel good about our self as a person.
- To feel good about what we're doing or accomplishing.
- To feel good about our future or where we're heading.
- To earn economic reward for our efforts, especially our "extra efforts."

Or, put another way — most of us seek praise, convenience, fun, money, importance, success, advancement, nobility, and altruism (more on these things shortly).

Once you identify the specific experiences and rewards employees enjoy and want, you then should make those things either a part of *doing* desired performance or a pay-off for *accomplishing* desired performance (while, of course, taking care to avoid making those same things a part of undesired performance). All this is the essence of *Step 2*, or the process of expanding the upside and shrinking the downside of doing desired performance.

By applying the two steps of motivation-building you make doing desired performance *more rewarding* than doing undesired performance for employees. This, in turn, causes employees to choose to perform a greater amount of desired performance. This is how motivation-building “happens.” It’s also what

the upcoming Top 10 Motivators of greater employee performance are about.

However, before jumping into the top ten motivators we're first going to take a brief side-trip to precisely define the concepts of performance and motivation. We do this to ensure clarity and understanding.

As the term is used herein, **performance** is human *action* and any *outcomes* that directly derive from it.

Action can take the form of either a single activity or a set of related activities. Mental and verbal processes, such as decision-making and conversation, are forms of activity. "Doing nothing" is also an activity.

An *outcome* is an object, condition, or situation resulting from human action. Here are examples that illustrate action and outcomes.

ACTION	OUTCOME
Floor-mopping	A clean floor
Decision-making	A certain decision
Selling	A sale made
Writing	A finished report

Action + Outcomes = PERFORMANCE

In light of each company's goals there are two kinds of performance:

1. Desired Performance
2. Undesired Performance.

As we've already stated, any performance that you want to occur we call **desired performance**. Typically it's performance that contributes to achievement of at least one of your organization's goals or priorities. It's also sometimes called *productive performance* or *good performance*.

Any performance that's not desired performance we call **undesired performance**. Typically it's performance that does not

contribute to achievement of any of your organization's goals or priorities. It's also sometimes called *poor performance* or *inadequate performance*.

Every incident of performance is either desired performance or undesired performance. "Neutral performance" does not exist. Or, put another way, any given employee at any given time is engaging in either desired performance or undesired performance. No one is ever engaging in "neutral performance" or "no performance."

As used herein, we define **motivation** as a state of mind that causes a person to choose to engage in (or pursue) a particular task, endeavor, or performance. Further, we define **motivation-building** as the act of creating the *conditions* that generate motivation. So relative to any particular performance that you'd like to see happen, motivation-building is the act of creating the conditions that generate a state of mind that causes employees to

engage in that particular performance. Any particular condition that causes motivation we call a **motivator**.

Since you can't read minds, the only way you can know when a person has motivation for a particular desired performance is by observing their actions. If they have the wherewithal to do the performance but aren't doing it, you conclude that they're lacking the motivation necessary for it. On the other hand, if they're doing the performance or attempting to do it, you conclude that they *have* the motivation for it.

Finally, as previously stated, the way that you create motivation within employees for accomplishing a certain desired performance is to make doing that desired performance more rewarding than doing undesired performance.

We now return to our pivotal question:
How do you go about making desired per-

formance more rewarding than undesired performance?

The way you make doing desired performance more rewarding than doing undesired performance is by applying one or more of the Top 10 Motivators of greater employee performance. We view these top ten motivators as being the ten most-effective ways a leader-manager can generate an increased amount of desired performance within their enterprise or team. We start with a “short-description list,” then expand it to a “one-sentence description list,” and, finally, provide a full explanation of each motivator in its own separate chapter.

(Note: If it happens that you came to this book looking for the “top 3 motivators” or the “top 5 motivators” of excellent employee performance, you’ll find them in this top 10 list. In our opinion, actions #1–3 are the top three motivators and actions #1–5 are the top five motivators of excellent employee performance.

Of course, for maximal results we suggest you consider applying all ten motivators.)