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Management 101: The art of motivation

The only way to get people to like working hard is to motivate them. Today, people must understand why they're working hard. Every individual in an organization is motivated by something different." This quote by the University of Louisville's Coach Rick Pitino rings loudly in today's workplace.

In the August 2010 column, we discussed the idea that "delegation" is a key management skill that you absolutely need to master. Certainly, developing an environment where staff can be motivated to achieve optimum results is another key management tool.

During a recent leadership training session, a participant related to me the following scenario, "I am a manager with the responsibility for supervising 7 administrative services employees. Last week, during my annual performance review, my boss indicated that an area in which I needed improvement was giving positive feedback to my staff for a job well done. He said I was always quick to criticize, but rarely did I recognize my staff for outstanding performance, which is one of the greatest motivational techniques available. I told the manager that my personal philosophy is that every employee has tasks to accomplish and is expected to perform them well — so why should I have to say 'good job' for something that is expected?" At this point in the conversation, the participant asked me for my suggestions.

Charles Schwab once said, "I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."

As I indicated to the baffled participant,

my philosophy begins with the concept that a manager is someone who works through and with others to get the job done and achieve results. A key element in achieving those results is managing the performance of your staff. In order to effectively manage performance, providing both positive and constructive feedback, a key motivational strategy, is needed. Managers should be putting forth as much effort to observe employees doing something right as they seem to be working to catch them doing something wrong.

I have learned that our success as managers — as leaders — is dependent upon our ability to create a motivational environment that brings out the best in people. In other words, help your employees believe in themselves and in their abilities, and their work will reflect the effort.

Perhaps, you should begin each working day by asking yourself a few questions:

- What will I do today to express trust in my staff?
- How will I give my staff the courage to do their best?
- What specific actions will I take to recognize my staff for who they are, what they accomplish, and what they can go on to achieve?

Identifying what employees have done well is positive reinforcement. Expressing appreciation provides a reward for their efforts, and people like to be appreciated for their hard work. As William James once said, "The deepest craving of human nature is the need to feel appreciated."

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to hear Fran Tarkenton, former Minnesota Vikings quarterback, tell a great story about positive feedback. During the

day-after film session, Tarkenton said he waited for Coach Bud Grant to tell everyone about the great play Tarkenton had made that was instrumental in winning a game against the Pittsburgh Steelers. Grant recognized and commended everyone for a job well done, except Tarkenton.

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Feeling dejected after the meeting, Tarkenton asked the coach why his great play was not mentioned. "Fran," the coach said, "You give 150 percent all the time. You always do your best. I didn't think I needed to commend you."

Moral of the story: Everyone needs the proverbial pat on the back, even those who contribute 150 percent.

As I mentioned to the baffled workshop participant, whoever you are, wherever you might be, there are talents to be recognized and uncovered in the employees around you. Give praise and encouragement to the talents you see in others. Understand them and stimulate them to make the best possible use of their abilities to achieve impressive results.

I would like to close with this thought by Jim Stovall, author of the book, "The Ultimate Gift." "You need to be aware of what others are doing, applaud their efforts, acknowledge their successes and encourage them in their pursuits ..." Then, we all win — the employees and the organization.

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