

A Consultant's View

Vol. XXI No. 12

December 2014

Motivating is Hard Work

We want to motivate our employees. There are lots of people offering suggestions on how to motivate them. Inc. Magazine has a list of "Perks that work." Many other lists of ways to motivate people are out there. However, much on these lists fail after a while. People may be motivated once and then ignore the offered perks. The problem is that no technique, not perk, no workplace setup will guarantee employee motivation.

The challenge for any manager is to figure out what would motivate any individual. It is easy when dealing with a group of people who have expressed their strong motivation for more money. Simply build a system to reward them with money for reaching goals that you want.

However, only a minority of people in the world are motivated to work hard for more money. A lack of money motivates a lot of people, but once they have "enough", that no longer is a motivating factor.

In today's business climate, people have many different internal motivating drives and often do not even know how to articulate those drives. In the December issue of Inc. Magazine, they have an article on motivating a number of different types of employees. Not only are there different types of employees, but people may have conflicting drives operating at different times during the day. No one system will work all the time for any single person. Simply applying the same

motivator to everyone can lead to a situation where people only want more.

To make matters worse, as people become managers, often they lose the informal connection with employees that would help them learn what would motivate someone. Many top managers seem to act mechanically towards employees and the motivational efforts seem to go wrong.

Motivation efforts gone wrong often help drive important employees away. The programming field is full of stories of employees being given tickets to an event that the employee can't attend because they were sent out of town to help a customer. One star programmer quit the week before being sent

on a bonus cruise. Years ago at a video gaming company, the programmers had been given a lot of money and promised more but things were going bad fast. One compensation consultant brought in to analyze the situation said that he had never seen such a large group of unhappy millionaires.

Motivation often is similar to education or selling which happen on a one to one basis. When we listen both to what a person says and what they do not say, we often can find out what motivates a person and can manage their environment to provide the incentives to work the way we would like them to. Or we may find out that this person really should not be part of this organization and should be moved out.

True motivation efforts are time consuming and challenging. We often have to change our actions and may need to look for new ways to operate in order to meet our hopes.

No One
System
Always Works

The Challenge of History

History is always challenging us. We have a history of making decisions in certain ways. However, the world around us keeps changing. At some point, that way of making decisions is going to fail.

This is the fundamental problem with any computer trading algorithm or stock trading system or even real estate investment system. All run into the problem that eventually, reality has changed so much that they don't work anymore.

In our businesses, we need to periodically rethink the fundamental assumptions that we have been operating under. This isn't a minor strategic alignment that we can do over a weekend. Instead, we need to rethink the basic premises of our business.

One of the best examples of the real world changing things happened in the automotive industry. For twenty years, the automotive industry has gotten leaner and leaner going to Just In Time supplier deliveries. Yet, that system is fragile. Over the past few years, an earthquake, floods in Thailand, a fire at a chemical plant in Germany have all interrupted essential supplies and nobody had back up inventory.

One way to know that our reality has changed is when new competitors enter our market and succeed. Taxi cab companies are finding that out in a big way with the new ride sharing companies doing well. In response, several taxi companies are borrowing techniques from ride sharing to improve their operations.

At some point, we start to reassess those old strategies and ask how has the world changed. In a number of cases, we need to change our strategies and look for new ways to make future decisions.

Risky World

Infoworld reported a case of a data center that right outside the door had a big red button with the word "Open" on it. No, it did not open the door. It was the emergency power shutdown for the whole center. Of course, someone tried to open the door by pushing that button and brought the whole place down.

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Prairie Trail Software, Inc.,

**Making Information
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