

Managing Motivation

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"Without the chance to meaningfully participate in steering one's own destiny, without the opportunity to gain the sincere respect of one's own peers, without an honest stake in making the community more successful through one's own work and ideas, employability can quickly decay into generic training programs or bogus choices..."

"Beyond Empowerment: Building a Company of Citizens" by Brook Manville, Josiah Ober, page 52, Harvard Business Review January 2003.

Today, businesses are dealing with massive change issues spearheaded by new strategic initiatives around technology. So much is possible! We can demographically get into our customer's heads, craft alliances that accentuate our creativity and negotiating skills, ask employees to deliver projects and new products in high-speed time frames, target audiences we never were able to reach before. But we're in more turmoil now than we've ever been.

Because of the economy, the ability for technology to make our established job functions more powerful, and the new demands on integrity issues we're targeting at Board levels due to Enron and WorldCom, we're facing a confusion we've not had to deal with before now:

- we find ourselves having to develop new strategies and behaviors that we didn't need to consider before, just to survive;
- our customers are more demanding than they've ever been and recognize that they hold all the cards;
- our products fall within the realm of commoditization and are difficult to separate from the pack, even though they are superb and unique;
- we face a world of almost unimaginable choice, making our products vie with competition we don't know how to contend with given the contracted time-to-market that's now possible;
- we've had to repeatedly rethink our brand, reposition our products, reorganize our employees just to stay alive;
- we've had to reconfigure the compensation packages – including bonuses, commissions, and benefits – to reflect the new types of business we're now handling.

We're getting agile and pro-active, creative and efficient. But we've neglected one piece of the puzzle. The most important piece. The piece without which we'd have no need for product or brand or compensation.

We've neglected the responsible, respectful care of our people.

PEOPLE

I believe that the word for this decade is Collaboration. People being with People. People deciding with People. People discussing, disagreeing, creating, aligning, resisting, fighting - all the things that flawed, unique individuals do together when asked to join each other toward a unified goal, for 40 or 60 hours a week.

Problem is, we're don't know how to do that well. We know how to do the strategizing and initiatives, the tactics and the implementations. But once we get to the Being rather than the Doing, we are stuck.

In terms familiar to sales people, we are very busy going from a traditional environment of telling people what we're doing and what is expected of them, to the consultative approach of asking people what they want to do – and then telling them what is expected of them.

We don't seem to have the skills to facilitate collaborative discussions in which people can figure out what they really need and how they should operate with others given their own unique values and beliefs, fears, needs, and requirements. We don't know how to keep people motivated so when we ask them to change jobs or work assignments, they will remain happy and productive. And we certainly don't know how to offer people a forum in which to create their own job, given the complex circumstances we're operating under.

We just don't know how to do the Being.

But if your best people don't see themselves as doing important work, if they don't have choices that fill them with self-respect and leadership potential and creativity, they will leave. What you'll have left is the people that don't care what they do, and are working with you just to earn their check, put in their hours, and go home.

JOBS – WHAT WE DO AND WHY CHANGE IS HARD

Let's look at how people choose and remain in their jobs:

1. they excel at the required tasks;
2. they have a history of doing the work you're asking them to do;
3. they enjoy their work;
4. they get a personal ego-satisfaction from doing their job well;
5. they have helped create the culture they are working within, and are comfortable with their tasks, their peers, and their social position;
6. they are respected by their peers;
7. they expect a certain amount of success from completing their job competently.

When people are told to do a different job, to accept and operate some technology that you've decided to sanction, they are no longer doing the specific job they hired on for. Add this to their inability to have a say in the governance or in the choices or in the implementation style, and you've got people with an attitude.

Several years ago, I did a job for a well-known windshield replacement company. The sales manager felt his group could be more efficient if they called their prospects semi monthly instead of visiting them monthly to give them donuts (That's right. Donuts.). He believed that by asking them Facilitative questions, like, "How do you choose which

company to work with? And what would we need to do in order to earn a bigger piece of your business?" he could improve revenue.

Revenue began increasing immediately, with commensurate increases in pay for the reps. As for the change in customer contact, those customers that wanted donuts got them delivered; those that wanted visits got them every other month, with bi-weekly phone calls. Customers were asked for their favorite choices, and accommodated according to a collaboration between the company's initiatives and the customer's requests.

And the sales reps all put in their notices on the same day. They gave the management an ultimatum: put us back into the field or we'll quit.

The problem? They had hired on to be field reps, and now they saw themselves as telephone reps. They LIKED seeing prospects daily and delivering donuts, even if they only saw 25 people a week versus the hundreds that they spoke with on the phone. They LIKED being in their cars in traffic 8 hours a day. They HATED being at a desk, on the phone, making 40 calls a day. That's not what they took their jobs to do.

So the company fired the manager that brought me in, hired a supervisor who liked donuts, and put the sales reps back into their cars.

No one had asked the reps what they wanted to do. No one helped the reps align their criteria around what was best for the clients or the company. No one collaborated with the reps to discover some sort of win-win outcome that would meet the goals of the company and the reps and the client and the management.

WHAT COMES FIRST? PEOPLE? OR INITIATIVES?

Managers understand that without people there's no company. Figuring out how to support the people in a way that keeps them delighted and creative is the larger problem.

We tell ourselves we are thinking about our people: we might meet with them to tell them what we're doing; we might ask for their input before we do what we're going to do anyway. But how often do we wait to do what we think we need to do in order to include them in a decision, or change our decision because of the input?

I recently interviewed the CEO and President of The Container Store, Kip Tindell, and asked him how he gets decisions made in his company:

"Decisions don't need to happen right away. As you shed more and more light on something it becomes more and more clear. If there is minority disagreement, we're delighted to stop, research more, and shed more and more light, and sometimes there's a good reason for it because there is stuff we've not seen and the minority is right. Much of time we can achieve immediate unanimity and those decisions are rarely wrong.

"But dissention is a signal to recognize that something is wrong. More time is needed to find out what's wrong if a couple of very bright knowledgeable people find something missing. We go for unanimity. Otherwise we might junk the whole idea."

Kip goes to his entire management team to get buy in. Difficult to do? Maybe. But what are the consequences?

Before I go into how to create a collaborative environment, I want to take a look at what I consider to be the biggest offender of the non-collaboration arena – technology.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

In our business worlds today, we spend a huge amount of human and resource capital on implementing technology. Generally, a decision to bring the technology aboard gets made at some lofty level, then some group (Change Management teams, Decision teams, Implementation teams) makes it happen. Their job function is to get the folks involved with the new implementation to be happy about doing jobs they weren't hired to do.

Oh, the new technology system is better for the company – necessary, even. It's probably good for the customers also. But I've not heard of many companies that believe it's their responsibility to keep their employees happy while implementing the technology, to hear their needs, their ideas, their fears; to teach them how to work with collaboratively with all the other groups and teams whose jobs will be effected by the technology; to change direction or initiatives because some of the folks are unhappy or need more time or want to make changes.

Specifically we forget that the techies and management and users all need to collaborate – and none of the groups has a similar job description or set of goals or vocabulary. We all know of several well-documented situations in which large companies lost millions because they didn't know how to have the technical people collaborate with the management people.

Technical folks, management people, and users all have different goals, outcomes, functions, capabilities, jobs – and we're asking them to work together without making them one work unit, without teaching them how to have a unified vocabulary and mission, without helping them add new criteria to their job descriptions so they want to get up each morning and do their best.

Years ago we used operate with customers solely through our need to sell product: we created a product, then pushed it out into the marketplace with no market testing, no focus groups, no consumer feedback, no questionnaires or market analysis or beta tests. Since those naïve days, we've learned that we need to take customers into consideration from even before the inception of an idea is complete.

Why are we not offering that same respect to our employees?

The problem lies with the managers. They are given a job to do – say, 'do great customer service,' or 'touch customers X times a month,' or 'get into our customer's heads,' – and they don't include 'employee happiness' or 'employee buy-in' or 'employee input' into the equation. They only see the end-result without any humans involved.

I recently spoke with a national sales manager from a large office supply company. He seemed to have all the bases covered: his national team was using a CRM package for when customers called in; he emailed his customers and prospects with new offerings a deals twice a month; and he sent out catalogues weekly.

'But how are you touching your customers?' I asked.

'What do you mean? I just told you.'

'Right. Um, how are you personally connecting with them?'

'I still don't understand the question. We're doing a fabulous job touching them weekly, not to mention regularly adding new prospects with the demographic studies we're doing and the e-mail information we're collecting.'

For him, touching and connecting was via technology. And according to his HR manager, not only was he not personally connecting with customers, he was implementing change without buy-in from the national reps. She told me there were internal problems as a result of this man's attitude, and good people were quitting. For him, it was all tactics and strategies and initiatives.

Imagine if we had the tools to create one big team with all the groups involved, and had them design their own implementation plan that would make everyone happy! Imagine if we knew how to collaborate, so the answers we need for success came out of the community? What are we doing instead? And what is the cost? How many of our best people are leaving because they are unhappy?

COLLABORATION

I believe it's possible to collaborate in such a way that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Here are the steps I believe we need to take to have all people involved decide to collaborate, to change, to implement.

Phase 1. uncovering needs

1. Have a meeting with all involved – ALL involved – and voice the proposed implementation/change.
2. Get feedback (verbal, written, email) during and following the meeting.
3. Create several groups that each include the full array of job descriptions, so each group would have, say,
3 technical people, 3 managers, and 3 users.
4. Have the groups spend 2 days together coming up with lists of feelings, fears, needs, annoyances, opposition, demands – whatever human beings need to go through when faced with immanent change. Audio or video tape these meetings.

Phase 2. airing issues

5. Take one person from each work group in the representative teams (i.e. one user, one manager, one tech expert) and create a larger central team that will speak for the ideas and feelings of the original group.
6. Collect all of the thoughts and needs of the smaller groups and put them in writing. Send out this collection to the entire collaborating body and have each member involved comment and respond with ideas.

7. Have the central team take the feedback and send it back out to the whole group. This includes dissention, so all people continue to be heard.

Phase 3. deciding

8. Use the data from the feedback and publish a questionnaire to the community and help them discover what needs to happen so they can accomplish the company goals while continuing to be motivated and willing to work hard to make the change happen.

9. Publish the responses to the questionnaire. Follow it up with ideas from the originating groups as to what the company needs to do to make this happen.

Phase 4. implementing

10. Upper management must respond to the results of the questionnaires and decisions and go through their own process so they can make whatever changes necessary to comply with their agendas and initiatives. They must then give their feedback back to the people.

11. The original groups must follow the progress of the company actions, and meet regularly to keep a running tab on the progress and how people are faring. Change what needs to get changed the moment it needs to change, by using the original groups to gain consensus and give feedback.

12. This is an iterative process until there is enough agreement so all can do the work and stay motivated.

This entire process will take months, of course. It also assumes trust in process, in the people, and in the outcome... the outcome will probably have a similar outcome but with different behaviors than originally envisaged. It's highly likely there will be a richer set of initiatives and strategies as a result of all the new ideas that will emerge.

Imagine trusting your employees to be the arbiters of change. What are the costs if you don't?

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