



No Money No Talk? Motivating staff without using money

Screen stars may do a double take at the notion, but whilst Nancy Kwan's character Suzie Wong, working in perhaps the most mercenary environment possible, started out insisting that money was all important, in the end it was human values that counted.

To put it in perspective when the lights go out how would you like to be remembered -- for the nice house and car or as someone who gave something back.

In general, everyone wants to be seen as a contributor and whilst bonuses and salary increments reward effort, there are many non-monetary ways to reward people for their endeavours. Both eastern and western literature is full of inspiration in this regard. Recall the Magnificent Seven, a western takeoff of a Japanese samurai classic about the triumph of good over evil and about how in the end the motivation for the Seven was not about money but about helping their fellow man.

If intrinsically most, if not all of us, hold such values and beliefs either from birth or via social conditioning, then it is a relatively simple matter to tap into them in order to motivate a person. To do so, however, requires intelligence, thought, and most important of all, leadership.

Winston Churchill kept a nation, on the brink of collapse, fighting against all odds by use of rhetoric. His speeches honest, determined, confident and timely, gave England that precious commodity, time, to rebuild her war machine and gain US support. A move that resulted ultimately in Allied victory and relative peace to this day. Much can be learned about motivation from some of the "larger than life" events and personalities. When applied in a business context, they can stir even the most recalcitrant employee to greater achievement.

To a large extent what matters is that proclaimed by Sir Brian Pitman who as CEO of Lloyds TSB increased its market capitalisation some 40 times. In his Leading for Value article in the April Harvard Business Review, Pitman stated "what's important is getting people to arrive at a meeting of minds around a small number of central beliefs which will determine their behaviour and ultimately the company's performance".

In Winston Churchill's case, his message was simple -- "we will fight for England and all it stands for until we die but we will never give in" and every Briton rallied to his cry. He knew the situation was desperate but he also knew if he could keep the Nazis at bay for long enough, he would ultimately prevail.

His genius was not only in finding a solution, but in motivating an entire nation to implement that solution. The same, on a far lesser scale, can be said of Pitman.

Whilst tomes of books and articles have been written about how to motivate people, and myriad tests and studies undertaken to give credence to what has been written, perhaps it is far better to stick to the basics.

This may be especially so in times of need.

When everything is going well, it is often hard to focus. Times are good and distractions abound. However, when things are bad, such as in times of war or indeed economic recession, the focus is on survival and as such it is far easier to obtain the "meeting of minds" about which Pitman speaks.

Provided the situation is carefully explained, the facts laid out, and a clear vision given of how to survive, then people will accept the need to give more of themselves, and giving more is what motivation is all about.

When people are successfully brought together to work for a goal whose importance is common to all, they will strive to meet that goal. No artificial devices are needed to motivate them. To keep them motivated, they need to be kept informed, they need to be empowered to offer their views, and they need to be heard and taken seriously even if their views are not accepted or endorsed. They will remain motivated as long as the reason for non-acceptance of their views is explained; they retain the feeling that they are empowered, and they feel their effort is important and valued.

Whilst remuneration is a very necessary part of the pact between employer and employee (and indeed certain remuneration structures make people work harder than others) what truly motivates people to increase their effort is the sense that others truly value and appreciate their input, and that their input is being put toward a clearly defined goal with which they identify.

In a poor economic climate then, it is these very human triggers that managers must pull to motivate staff. It is funny, but when people have less of it, they generally finally understand that "money isn't everything" and indeed realise that even when they had money "aplenty" it wasn't really what made them "tick". Money is a measure of ones worth to an organisation, but what really drives them to achieve is their commitment to the "cause" as defined by the organisation, and accepted and embraced by those serving in it. Whilst one cannot be sure "that hard work never killed anyone", most still accept that it will finally be rewarded both financially and in the sense of personal achievement. It is the leader's role then to set the stage to enable such acts to play, and like Suzie, to allow an individual's true nature to shine.

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