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WEIGH IN

The Don'ts & Do's of Creating an Inspired Workplace

By **John Baldoni**

This article is adapted from ideas expressed in Baldoni's new book, [Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders](#), published by McGraw-Hill in January 2005. CIO.com also carries an [excerpt](#).

It typically goes like this. The senior vice president for strategic planning looks over at the senior vice president of finance and growls, "Things would be a lot better if people were motivated." Both senior veeps then lock eyes on the vice president for human resources and if looks could kill that veep would be ashes. Motivation has a tendency to bring out the best in people.

What so many at the top forget is that motivation cannot be imposed; it cannot be introduced into the monthly planner like the next flavor of the month. Motivation occurs internally, but it is affected by external circumstances such as a recent wave of layoffs, a cutback in benefits, rising health care premiums, and yes, even the fat

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bonuses those at the top received while others received nothing. All of these things *do* affect motivation. Negatively, of course.

Motivation is the art of getting people to do what needs to be done. Leaders do not motivate per se; they create conditions for people to motivate themselves. As a manager, you can look at motivation in two ways: what not to do and what to do.

What NOT to Do

- *Be an airhead.* Never think about the organization or its people. Act blithely as if everything is going along smoothly.
- *Hide from trouble.* At the first sign of trouble, leave the office. Turn off your mobile phone. Disappear until the heat dies down then calmly saunter back into the smoldering ruins of your department.
- *Rah-Rah, Blah, Blah.* When the next corporate initiative appears, give a speech about how important it is. Don't bother explaining why or what needs to be done.
- *Avoid responsibility.* Never take responsibility for things that go wrong. Find ways to make other people look bad.
- *Set impossible goals.* Develop work assignments that are impossible to achieve. Deny people necessary resources to complete the assignments. Deny all budget requests. Advance deadlines without warning.
- *Practice over-your-shoulder managing.* Insist in sticking your nose into everyone's business. Talk about your great ideas and how no one else's can compare to yours.
- *Take credit at the expense of others.* Always assume that when things go right, it's because of you. Talk about how everything would fall apart if it were not for your sharp management skills.
- *Play the blame game.* When things go wrong, point the finger at other people, preferably people who report to you and cannot fight back. Speak badly about your boss in front of others but suck up whenever the boss is around.
- *Punish freely.* When people slip up, make examples of them. Talk about their mistakes in front of everyone. Make frequent use of the word *stupid*. Also, look to stick it to people you don't like.
- *Pput yourself.* Talk up your accomplishments and how hard you are working. Make certain that people know that you cannot possibly do more. After all, you're important to the company.

Enough is enough! Even the senior VPs have gotten the point that when it comes to motivation, putting oneself first is not a sound strategy or even a viable tactic. To create an inspired workplace, one where people want to be there because they feel their work is important and their contributions matter, managers need to put the needs of the organization first.

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What to Do

- *Think about people.* Consider what the people in your organization do and how you might support them with ideas, resources and your time.
- *Put yourself second.* Grace is essential to leadership. And grace comes to those who look to put others ahead of themselves.
- *Communicate frequently.* Keep people apprised of what is happening and not happening. When things are going smoothly, let people know. When things are tanking, talk about it and ask for suggestions about turning things around.
- *Delegate responsibility and authority.* When giving someone responsibility for a task, also give them the authority (e.g., people, resources, time) to get the job done. Make sure everyone knows that this employee is responsible and in charge.
- *Challenge people.* When awarding job assignments, look for a task that can develop an employee's capabilities. Encourage them to accept it and assure them of your support (but not your micro-management).
- *Provide resources.* Consider yourself as the bench coach for your employees. Do what you can do to find resources for them.
- *Give incentives for doing what matters.* Use incentives to encourage people to think about the end game, i.e., what they need to do to drive the business forward. When developing incentives, tie them to business objectives like sales quotas, quality improvements and customer service metrics.
- *Acknowledge contributions.* Let people know how you feel about what they are doing, especially when they are making a good contribution. Praise people in front of their peers.
- *Reward meaningfully.* Reward people in the manner they wish to be rewarded. If they are motivated by more money, create bonuses. If time off is what matters, award comp time.
- *Put people first.* Yes, it's a truism that people make the difference. But it is also just plain true. It is up to leaders to demonstrate in thought, word and deed that people do come first.

The Authentic Connection

There is more myth than fact swirling around the subject of motivation, more smoke than substance. But what is real is the connection between leader and follower. When I think of ways to motivate I recall examples of men and women who acted for the benefit of others when it mattered.

The legendary Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton went hungry so there would be extra food for those on his team who were ill. Col. David Hackworth, the most decorated soldier in U.S. Army history, walked point in the jungle of the Mekong Delta with his raw recruits so they would be better protected as well as better trained. Mary Kay Ash, founder of the cosmetics company that bears her name, made it a policy that each of her salespeople would receive recognition for their sales, no matter how small. And the owners of Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Zingerman's deli and mail order company

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hold regular meetings where employees have input into departmental and organizational decisions. These leaders have created conditions where people can motivate themselves and in the process build an inspired workplace that achieves lasting results for individuals, teams and entire organizations.

One last thing, none of these folks ever looked to the folks in human resources to motivate their people. They looked first to themselves.

John Baldoni is a leadership communications consultant who works with Fortune 500 companies as well as non profits including the University of Michigan. E-mail him at john@johnbaldoni.com.

Most recent responses ...

When a person works within a large publically owned coporation, there can be organizations within that understand movtivation yet intentionally use the don'ts for personal advancement. Perhaps this IS when the HR VP needs and should get involved.

Lorrie
Manager
WLP
[Email](#)
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Unfortunately most of the C-level managers I've worked for have no interest beyond the 90 day financial reporting window.(Bonuses, you know.)

Most of them never made any attempt to communicate to anyone other than their peers, superiors or direct reports. The "little people" tend to be invisible and unrepresented in the grand scheme.

Dave Burkett
Principal
Oak Business Services Co.
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The article is very inspiring. It is an eye opener for the micro managers. It also gives thoughts for the people to make distinction between the leadership and the management roles. In the current days of knowledge workers, motivation comes to the employees from thier bosses (no matter whether the boss is manager or a leader) only if the boss adds

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value to the employee's role, employee's knowledge, and if the employee is better heard for his participation in the major decision making process.

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There are some good ideas that may prove to be helpful.

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