

Motivating Team Members

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Organizational success has always depended on delivering results through teamwork. However, with the increasing prevalence of flat, networked, and matrix structures, effective teamwork is becoming even more critical

In these types of organizational structures, individuals come together—forming teams—for the duration of a project or for the amount of time it takes to implement a change program. When a team meets its original objectives, it dissolves, and members migrate to new teams—each with new people and a new purpose. As a result, many professionals will lead teams at some point during their careers. Yet too often, there is little or no guidance available to help leaders motivate their team members.

Although it is impossible to be formulaic with people, there are some team leader behaviors and techniques that can maximize the chances of success. By applying these, while building genuine relationships with team members, a leader can create and motivate a high-performing team.

What You Need to Know

I was recently asked to lead the team of which I was formerly a member. How can I best motivate the team as I transition from member to leader?

Beware of trying to perpetuate the relationships with your team colleagues on the same basis as before. Think about how to create some distance, so that you can most effectively perform the team leadership tasks. It may help to talk to the team about how you are going to effect the transition and what they can expect. Consider requesting regular feedback from team members, to keep in touch with their response to you and to help gauge the need to make any adjustments to your style.

I am not motivated by the goals my organization has set for my team, and this makes it very difficult to lead and motivate team members. What can I do?

As a team leader, you sometimes have to support organizational objectives even when you disagree with them. Try to see the bigger picture and consider the reasons for your team's objectives from a wider perspective. This may help to make sense of them and to develop some motivation. If the rationale still eludes you, try to renegotiate your objectives in a way that provides you some new

motivation. You cannot expect a team to feel motivated if they can detect reluctance on the part of their leader, so find something in what the team has been tasked with that motivates you.

Do motivational techniques work similarly on everyone?

In a diverse team, individual members' motivations are very likely to be different. A good leader will work to determine what works for each person. However, there are some fundamental tactics that can reveal individuals' motivations and help generate ideas for satisfying those motivations. Perhaps the simplest of these tactics is to ask!

What if my team does not respond to my attempts to motivate them?

If you are not achieving success with your team, you may not correctly understand their motivations. Observe the team interacting, and reflect on their possible sources of satisfaction. Try meeting their needs by doing something different. Alternatively, if you have a sufficiently trusting relationship with your team members, call a meeting and have a frank discussion about what seems to be missing.

What to Do

Keep It Personal

The most important thing to remember about teams is that they are comprised of people. The joy, as well as the frustration, of dealing with people is that each one has different values, beliefs, and motivations—and these are not always transparent. However, the effects of offending an individual's values and beliefs, or of preventing them from satisfying their motivations, can range from creating apathy to causing actual damage. As our values and beliefs are an intrinsic part of “who we are,” when we are asked to compromise them, we feel as if we are compromising ourselves. This often results in unexpected or undesirable responses which can destabilize the team. Thus, it is critical to be sensitive to individual team members' belief systems.

Create a Team Mission Statement

In order to effect a motivated, well-aligned team, you need to create an inspirational context in which it can work and find success. This means ensuring that each member of the team knows why the team exists, and its purpose. Create a team *mission statement* (also called a *vision* or *purpose*) that

represents the broader perspective. It must explicitly state the ultimate reason that team members have been brought together. Communicate the mission statement broadly and refer to it frequently in order to motivate and focus the team.

Establish Terms of Engagement

In addition to a well-crafted mission statement, an effective team should establish terms of engagement. These terms define the “rules” to which the team will adhere, and are best derived from the team itself. Terms of engagement create the structure that can carry a team through the difficult times when the initial excitement of its mission begins to wane. Team members can fall back on these when relationships are strained and when tensions arise.

The terms of engagement for any given team will vary, but in general should include:

- *Respect for each other.* This includes active listening, providing feedback, and valuing diversity in terms of the values, skills, and talents of each individual team member. Active listening is one of the most powerful communication tools anyone can exercise. An active listener’s full attention must be given to the communicator, with a non-judging acceptance of what is being said, and using body language that demonstrates alignment. No interruptions should stem the flow of the communication and the active listener should respond only when the communicator has finished transmitting his or her message. A response should be made in the first person (“I”) to show acceptance of personal responsibility for opinions or views.
- *Conflict management.* Although many people are averse to it, conflict can sometimes be a creative force, bringing fresh ideas and energy to a team. Creative conflict needs courage and openness, however; hostile conflict must be avoided. Establish guidelines for managing conflict.
- *Decision-making.* If there is a divide in opinions, what is the mechanism for resolution? Is the decision-making process always a democratic one? Does the team leader have a casting vote? When is consensus replaced by an autocratic decision process?
- *Time management and focused commitment.* This may include a guideline encouraging prompt arrival at meetings, or discouraging distractions during team activities, such as the use of cell phones or wireless handheld devices.

Understand Individuals’ Motivations

Everyone’s sense of reward and satisfaction for their contribution to a team effort will be different. It is important to identify this for each team member so that the roles can be allocated effectively and appropriately. Some team members may have an interest in developing new capabilities, in which case they may desire a role that is not in line with their experience. This will require additional support and coaching from the team leader. Others may prefer a team role that increases their experience

in a particular area. An effective leader can help team members find a role with which they are comfortable by providing reflections on their strengths and experience.

Assign Roles

For a team to function effectively and efficiently, a range of roles must be filled. If everyone is busy generating ideas, there is no one to implement them. If everyone is waiting to be inspired, no inspiration will occur. The full range of role responsibilities must be assigned to ensure that the full implementation process is covered—from idea conception to delivery and completion. Most people have a preference along this continuum where they wish to focus their contribution efforts. It is important to know where team members' preferences lie. Clear personal goals for each team member should be discussed and agreed, in line with the role responsibilities and in support of the team objectives. Personal goals should be *SMART*:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ctionable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-bound

If an imbalance occurs, different roles may need to be negotiated.

Communicate Effectively

A high-performing team must communicate honestly, constructively, and openly. Nothing important goes unsaid; thoughts and feelings are shared freely without fear of retribution or injury to personal feelings. Reviews and evaluations should be part of this communication so that intermediary goals can be determined or adjusted. Ongoing feedback on individual contributions and performance is another critical element of this communication flow.

Show Empathy

Effective team leaders empathize with team members in all stages of the team's existence. The process of bringing a team from inception to smooth operation—sometimes called *forming*, *storming*, *norming* and *performing*—can be unsettling. This is especially true as a team progresses from a cordial beginning to a more settled stage during which personal agendas and animosities may begin to emerge. It is important to help team members sort out issues during this turbulent and sometimes

chaotic time, in order to move on to the more creative phase. Help facilitate this process by showing empathy and keeping team members focused on the big picture.

Reward Achievement and Lead by Example

Achievements big and small within a team should be noted and celebrated. Contributions of any size can be encouraged through recognition and reward—though the reward does not necessarily have to be a monetary one. It is important that all team members feel that their contribution is both important and valued.

The team leader's role is to ensure that the team has the direction, support and resources necessary to properly accomplish its tasks. An effective leader will step in from time to time to join with team members as an equal, but will also know when to step back, create distance, and give direction, encouragement and reward. Leading a high-performing team is a satisfying managerial function that will enhance your reputation as a leader. Thus, strive to serve as a role model and to exhibit the behaviors you seek in your team members.

Provide Closure

In many organizations, teams are transient—constantly being formed and re-formed according to the strategic agenda. Launching a team and giving it closure at the end of its life cycle is a necessary part of the process; it falls to the team leader to perform these beginning and ending rituals.

What to Avoid

You Neglect to Lead

Trying to be “one of the gang” is a common mistake among team leaders, who instead should be stepping back and providing the context and resources to enable the team to function effectively. It is sometimes difficult, especially for leaders promoted from within the team, to establish sufficient distance to gain respect and yet maintain sufficient closeness to preserve relationships. As you tackle this difficult balancing act, be transparent in your communications so that your team knows what you are doing and can assist you in achieving objectives.

You Don't Assign Explicit Roles

It is tempting to assume that people will naturally fall in step behind a team goal without explicitly assigning the roles that need to be filled. However, a team can quickly become unbalanced and dysfunctional if members are vying for the same role or responsibilities—while other roles are shunned altogether. Be explicit about who will be responsible for which tasks, and make sure to review and reward behavior regularly to encourage team members to value each other.

You Attempt to Avoid Conflict

Imposing rules to “prevent” conflict from happening can stem the creative potential of a team. Conflict within a team may engender a feeling of losing control, which can be scary for a team leader. However, creating a process to manage and resolve conflict can enable a team to reach new heights of creativity. Establish and agree upon the conflict management process before conflict arises—do this when forming the terms of engagement. Get buy-in early so that the team has a benchmark to which it can return.

You Allow the Environment to Stagnate

Teams can become disheartened when they do not achieve, or when they exist in an environment without challenge. Sometimes, team leaders have to inject a challenge or create a crisis in order to renew the energy and re-create the focus. There is nothing like a common “enemy,” so to speak, to get the motivation flowing again!

Where to Learn More

Books:

Adair, John. *The Inspirational Leader: How to Motivate, Encourage and Achieve Success*. Kogan Page, 2005.

Brounstein, Marty. *Managing Teams for Dummies*. Hungry Minds, 2002.

Gibson, Cristina B., and Susan G. Cohen, eds. *Virtual Teams That Work: Creating Conditions for Virtual Team Effectiveness*. Wiley, 2003.

O'Connor, Joseph, and Andrea Lages, *How Coaching Works*. London: A & C Black, 2007.

Web Sites:

Team Motivation by Peter Grazier: www.teambuildinginc.com/article_teammotivation.htm

Motivating team members through tough times: www.lmdulye.com/Generic2-WAYCOMPASS.PDF

How to motivate your team: www.funevents.com/p4_motivteam.htm

The Top Ten Most-effective Ways of Motivating Greater Team Member Performance:
www.correllconcepts.com/Motivation-creator/motivation-building.htm