

DONALD J. SAGER

Director

Public Library of Columbus and Franklin County
Columbus, Ohio

Leadership and Employee Motivation

While most people have a fair idea of what leadership is, there is some disagreement about the meaning of motivation. For many, motivation is the method used to get people to work. For others it represents higher salaries, fringe benefits and improved working conditions. Still others view it as a management exercise. By the end of this paper, I hope readers will have some different views of motivation and its implications for library supervisors.

It is appropriate to begin with a discussion of leadership, since it is essential to an understanding of motivation. Peter Drucker said that leadership is that quality of examining work to ensure that effort is not placed where there are no results. According to this definition, leadership is the skill of establishing priorities and marshalling resources to achieve worthwhile goals. While some may disagree with this definition, few will argue that Drucker's view is unreasonable. Supervisors have the difficult and primary task of determining what is important in their organization. Drucker advises them to forget about yesterday's services, to maintain today's breadwinners and, as managers, to emphasize and nurture tomorrow's objectives. Indeed, a fundamental rule of leadership is to delegate yesterday and undertake tomorrow. Those expensive experiences in management ego, in developing and maintaining services and collections long after analyses have revealed their failure, must be avoided. Leadership is the art of recognizing the mistake, even one's own, and correcting it before it bleeds the institution.

The leader is also the person who must ask himself and the members of his administrative team to redefine regularly the purpose and role of

their institution. The leader must clarify the institution's goals and objectives and remind his team of those ends. To be successful, the leader must ensure that the team knows both the goals and the strategy.

This definition of leadership depicts the leader as a team player. Single all-powerful executives who make unilateral decisions affecting thousands of people are rarely heard of today. The task of management has become too complicated to permit such autonomy. This is especially true in library management, where the director's major role is to serve as an interface between governance, staff and clientele. Except in the smallest library, he rarely has the time or skill to direct all phases of the library's operation. The chief executive must delegate those responsibilities to others.

Today's leader must exercise a new type of skill, i.e., motivating people to achieve increasingly complex and costly goals. In the public sector that role is complicated by the limitations placed upon us of economics, legal and regulatory requirements, technology, and society. Nonetheless, just as any craftsman employs his tools to complete his work, so are leaders bound to employ human resources to achieve their goals.

In fulfilling managerial responsibilities, most of us are old enough to recognize that people are no longer willing to work as they once did. This is not necessarily either good or bad. Cheap and willing labor is no longer available in this country. Even student labor, so plentiful in the past, is becoming more difficult to obtain, and most students are unwilling to submit to the endless, mindless drudgery of shelving thousands of books. They will work, but prefer to do so in areas where they can gain useful experience which will further their own careers. To compete, libraries will have to devote more attention in the future to developmental programs which will give the person performing routine tasks a greater sense of responsibility. An advertisement in today's newspaper is no guarantee of getting a competent and willing worker for the salary you feel is competitive. Too often the solution seems to be a higher salary, but this is not necessarily so.

The worker of today is far different from that of twenty years ago. He is probably better educated. More than likely there are two breadwinners in the family. Women no longer see life and career in terms of their husbands; men are no longer the lords and masters of their households. The family continuity binding a worker to the same career his father had has ceased to exist. Very few workers today worry about securing themselves for their old age. We are a world of pleasure-seekers and only the masochist enjoys spending extra hours chained to his desk. We take the vacations, health insurance, sick leave and other fringe benefits for

granted today; even salary has lost its luster. The ultimate fear of job loss has been cushioned by assurance of unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation, Equal Employment Opportunity, unions, due process, and social security. It makes no difference that it wasn't always so. All of this has become part of the employee's rights. The worker has indeed changed — and not necessarily for the worse. He has found dignity and pride, and those elements are the key to motivation in today's society.

A good understanding of the worker is necessary for an understanding of motivation. Traditionally, the prevailing definition of the worker has been inspired by the dominant institution in society. During the Middle Ages that institution was the Catholic church, which held forth the spiritual man and woman with the fundamental goal of salvation. From the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, the predominant institution was industry, from which sprang economic man and woman with the acceptable goal of making money. Today the prevailing definition is more difficult to identify, for 500 years of change have been concentrated into the last 25 years.

Frederick Taylor has been called the father of scientific management. He developed time-and-motion studies as a basic tool of management. He also proposed the concept of the worker as an interchangeable part, a role Taylor genuinely believed the worker preferred in that it relieved him of decision-making. Thus, mechanistic man and woman appeared and an era began which culminated with the Hawthorne studies.

The Hawthorne studies revealed that physical variables such as lighting and temperature do not affect production. Workers are more affected by other workers. Thus, the concept of social man and woman was proposed, and the human relations movement started. No sooner was this model accepted as a basis for motivating employees than it was discovered that workers were willing to restrict their individual output in order to earn the acceptance of their coworkers. Counseling was then initiated, and the emotional man and woman were created.

The relevance of this history to a discussion of motivation is that most supervisors took on their responsibilities during a period when one or several of these philosophies were in their ascendancy. Many continue to use the skills and techniques which applied to those times in today's entirely different environment.

There are currently as many different definitions of the American worker as there are management specialists. Frederick Herzberg has defined two varieties: the neo-mechanistic or instrumental man or woman, a detached specialist in today's computerized society; and the consumer, whose goal is immediate consumption — a quantum step away from the economic model of less than fifty or sixty years ago. The families seen

wandering aimlessly through discount stores on Sunday afternoons, wondering where to spend their money first, are examples of the consumer model.

Whatever definition of the modern American worker is used, it is important to understand his goals in order to motivate him. People's goals vary, as Herzberg's two other definitions of the worker illustrate. Based on archetypes which he borrowed from the Old Testament, Herzberg saw the worker as represented by Adam and Abraham. Adam is an instinctively lazy man, only somewhat removed from the animal in that he is capable of perceiving an infinite variety of pain. Indeed, Adam perceives pain in three dimensions — past, present and future. He remembers pain, feels present pain, and anticipates future pain. The worker as Adam prevails because of this characteristic. He seeks to avoid pain by obtaining security, safety, good working conditions, salary and fringe benefits. Herzberg called these elements hygiene factors. They are essential to the animal in man and for some, they provide a powerful motivator. Abraham, however, is unique in Biblical experience. He entered into a covenant, or contract, with God which stated that certain things belong to God and certain things are reserved for Abraham. Abraham is a human being who strives for growth. He takes hygiene factors for granted; he is motivated by other goals.

As I noted, it is essential to determine what an individual likes or needs in his work if motivation is to occur. If people are asked what they want from their work, they will respond with many generalizations. In the library field, people are likely to say they like working with books or with other people. Until recently (before passage of California's Proposition 13), some librarians may have said that they liked their work because it was secure and had status. Others may say they like creating order out of chaos. However, if specific information is required, they must be asked to relate actual experiences, both good and bad. Studies performed on this basis show that people like the following aspects of their work, ranked in order of preference:

1. Achievement, a sense of being able to see something tangible derived from their effort, such as a well-organized collection or a new physical facility.
2. Recognition or appreciation from their supervisors or colleagues.
3. The work itself. A person who enjoys meeting people, for example, will have a greater interest in public service work than one who does not.
4. Increased responsibility, such as enlarging the job to reflect the individual's capabilities.
5. Advancement or promotion within the organization.
6. Opportunity to learn new things, or growth.

These same studies have also revealed the things people do not like about their jobs:

1. Restrictive policies or a restrictive administration. For example, if a librarian in public services finds that he is prevented from extending certain services or resources to patrons, he will become increasingly frustrated with his job.
2. Poor supervision. The manager who is unsupportive or incompetent is going to make life miserable for subordinates.
3. Poor interpersonal relationships. Unless an employee likes the people he works with, the job will clearly become undesirable.
4. Poor working conditions. If the environment is noisy, the lighting poor, or the temperature uncomfortable, these factors will obviously affect the way employees feel about their job.
5. Poor salary. Strange as it may seem, this is not the number one complaint. Salary is still important, but in the sense that an employee's belief that he is poorly paid can seriously affect his job performance.
6. Low status and lack of security.

From these results it is obvious that what makes people happiest and motivates them in their job is what they do. What makes them unhappiest is the situation in which they do it.

Returning to Herzberg's archetypes of Adam and Abraham, it can be seen that hygiene factors are related to job environment. To satisfy Adam, these factors must be dealt with. However, to satisfy Abraham, motivation or growth factors must be offered. In order to motivate someone, two things must be known. Is the individual satisfied with the hygiene factors offered by the job, i.e., salary, fringe benefits, security and status, and interpersonal relationships? Second, will the individual be challenged by the job?

Unfortunately, the latter factor is not easy to determine. I recall being interviewed once about the attribute I found most essential in the library profession. I told the reporter that I valued creativity more than any other. I could forgive any fault but its absence. When the reporter asked why I felt it was more valuable than technical competence or reliability, I responded that a truly creative person is self-motivating. All he needs is technical help, feedback and a little orientation about the institution's goals. In short, with a creative person there is no problem with providing motivation. Finding such workers, however, is another matter.

Managing the self-motivated person is an art. It is possible to frustrate and lose a valuable asset through overmanagement. Some managers believe that to motivate these persons a goal must be established that they

cannot reach. However, people with high achievement motivation are already performing at their maximum. To be effective in managing the high achiever, stay out of his way. When I review the process of personnel evaluation with my staff, I often find those who feel it is redundant to evaluate the work of an effective, long-term employee. They consider evaluation appropriate only for the new or problem employee. Yet the self-motivated person needs the evaluation just as much. He requires reassurance and feedback about the effectiveness of his work. This is a form of recognition which makes his job worthwhile.

It is also important to realize that high achievers do not necessarily make good managers. There are different qualities involved, and all too often the motivation of high achievers can be destroyed by the assumption that they can translate those skills which made them successful in one aspect of the organization to another. That may not necessarily be the case. The familiar Peter Principle, which claims that an individual rises to his maximum level of incompetence, is too true to be humorous.

Another point to remember is that people have ideas of their own. If an individual is not allowed to exercise his creativity and initiative, he will surely be frustrated. This applies to everyone, not just the high achiever. While not everyone elects to exercise that right all the time, managers should not get into the habit of directing personnel in certain functions, or in ways that will kill initiative. I learned a technique from McDonald's sophisticated personnel training program which I think is pertinent. I once retained one of their regional training managers to explain some of their techniques to our first-line supervisors. He told us that to train a new employee, the supervisor should first go through the procedure to be learned, explaining and demonstrating to the employee how each step should be performed. Then the employee repeats the instructions while the instructor performs the steps. If the employee omits or confuses a step, the instructor does not stop to correct him, but simply continues following the incorrect instructions so the employee can witness the consequences. The last step of the training process requires the employee to demonstrate his mastery by performing the task for the supervisor.

The critical step is the middle one, in which the employee describes what is logical in his mind. Trainers continually learn that their way is not always the best way. Even a beginner can teach them how to do it better. McDonald's doesn't insist on one standard procedure if someone has a more effective way.

To understand employees, supervisors must attempt to look at the employees' work in the same way they do. I find that I continually have to relearn even the simplest functions because of what I observe in my staff. Supervisors have the grand concept that the world is perfectible.

Most employees know better and design their work routines in the face of hard realities, attempting to make the work more interesting, challenging and comfortable. This does not imply that supervisors should ignore their responsibility to initiate change and develop standard procedures. Without these actions, organizations stagnate and training cannot be effectively achieved. It does mean that management must recognize that the ultimate impact it has upon the client is not accomplished by the changes, policies or procedures it proposes, but rather by how the person at the front desk implements those proposals.

I believe that encouraging creative change is the ultimate motivator, provided that the changes are desirable and not implemented for their own sake. Innovation can make even a routine task important, for it gives the individual an opportunity to make a significant contribution through testing and implementing changes. The individual grows in the job, achieves a tangible goal, and should receive some recognition for the effort. These three things — growth, achievement and recognition — are elements which make people like their jobs.

Another theory of motivation — theory X and Y, developed by Douglas McGregor — has some important contributions to this review. When McGregor developed these terms he was seeking labels that would be as neutral as possible in order to avoid an implied preference for one theory over the other. In theory X management, the worker is conceived of as passive and inert, the lazy animal or Adam archetype discussed previously. Theory Y management depicts the worker as perfectible, as an individual with a need to grow. McGregor proposed that theory Y management does not imply letting people “do their own thing.” He felt that management had an obligation to provide goals which were not only clear but determined collectively. At the same time, he did not wish to label theory X management as autocratic. The emphasis is on achieving harmony with discipline, McGregor explained; however, some people respond only to authority and do not wish to participate in decision-making.

McGregor’s contribution to the study of motivation underlined the importance of flexibility: application of theory X or Y management techniques should depend on the individual being supervised and the circumstances. I learned much about management techniques when I worked for General Motors many years ago. GM experimented, as did many other corporations, with a matrix organizational structure in contrast to a traditional hierarchy. When I entered public service and directed my own library, I believed that this structure might be relevant to the library profession, with public service functions placed along one axis of the grid and supportive functions along the other. I finally came to the real-

ization that it would not work. Although the library possesses a professional atmosphere, many of the employees simply resisted participation in decision-making. They were interested in certain aspects of their job and were satisfied to remain there. Participation in the management of the institution caused a great deal of insecurity feelings among them, and friction and indecision resulted. Rather than adopt a uniformly participative management style, a supervisor must adjust his management approach according to the character and motivation of the individuals on his administrative staff. Although the library profession currently tends to stress theory Y, there are tasks which do not permit much flexibility. When assigning those tasks that do, however, the assignment should include a major responsibility in determining how the problem should be attacked, provided the person wishes to have that involvement. People need to have a stake in their work; they do not want things done to them. For many managers this involves a degree of risk, for often it is their job and reputation that is in jeopardy if their staff fails. This necessitates careful definition of the problem: identification of supervisory responsibility and staff responsibility. Nonetheless, supervisors must be willing to take such risks in order to motivate their staffs. Supervisors can neither run their organization by fear nor fear to run it; rather, they must walk the line between these extremes.

Another significant contributor to the study of motivation is Chris Argyris, who was concerned with the phenomenon of built-in obsolescence. Argyris's work dealt primarily with the problem of repetitive tasks in industry. Motivation under these circumstances was found to be extremely difficult. Most assembly-line workers had resigned themselves to the fact that there was no future or inherent interest in their jobs. The only motivation their supervisors could offer was higher wages. However, Argyris realized that the cost of motivating alienated people is very high. To deal with this problem, Argyris concentrated on granting more responsibility to each worker, often assigning full responsibility for assembling entire units rather than single sections. He found that production usually dropped temporarily but soon picked up, along with employee motivation and morale. He demonstrated that the price management pays for poor motivation is poor morale and, eventually, higher costs.

The greater lesson Argyris taught is that people need feedback about their impact on the organization. If they lack pride and respect for their roles in the organization, their energies will be directed elsewhere. In some institutions, "beating the system" is an employee's most creative activity. If employees are treated as nothing more than warm bodies, that is all they will be. If institutions are to avoid the resulting obsoles-

cence, they must stop the mistrust which seems to permeate them, seeping down from the upper levels of management to the public service desk.

Clearly, some tasks cannot be made more interesting or challenging. These jobs, all too common in the library field, are the ones which should be automated out of existence. Library work is one of the most labor-intensive services in the public sector, and each feasible opportunity to automate ought to be embraced. Where this is not possible, workers should not be insulted by attempts to convince them that they should be happy in performing that task.

Certain techniques are commonly employed in attempting to motivate persons performing these tasks, but they have not been very effective. For example, job rotation has often been suggested to help workers cope with repetitive tasks. However, this is not a solution; it only provides workers with varieties of pain. A switch from washing dishes to washing silverware still means you're washing eating utensils — a necessary task only if an automatic dishwasher is not available. However, it is possible to enlarge such tasks as Argyris did in his assembly-line experiments. Giving additional responsibility to an individual can enrich his job and provide greater motivation.

Retraining is often recommended for employees who have become obsolete in their jobs; it has the dual function of making the individual more productive for the institution and of motivating him through an awareness of the investment the institution has made in him. This is not an uncommon problem in librarianship, due to increasing automation in the field. However, resurrection is much more difficult than giving birth; it is far better to prevent obsolescence by making certain that each job keeps people up to date.

A sound basis for motivation in any library is an adequate budget for staff development. A reasonable figure is 2 percent of the personnel budget, which is the amount the more progressive industries allocate. I suspect that few libraries spend more than a fraction of this on staff development. Our record in this area is no better than that of many other professions, despite our alleged role in society of promoting continuing education. We think nothing of placing someone with twenty years of experience on the shelf in order to hire a recent graduate familiar with new technology and resources. Unfortunately, society is becoming educated more to do less, and the result is frustration and a vast underutilization of talent.

Douglas McGregor made the classic statement that each person should be approached with an open mind and not an open mouth. Each person must be allowed to demonstrate his ability. If employees cannot demonstrate sufficient competence or willingness to correct professional

deficiencies, then replacement may be considered. Often the challenge of new responsibilities which are a result of technological or social change affecting the organization will serve as motivation to produce a truly effective employee.

Motivation has always been a worldwide problem. People have tried to get others to do something by asking them, by applying psychology, by assigning through various communication techniques, by offering money, and by training. The most common motivational technique, however, has probably been the use of threat. Frederick Herzberg calls this KITA (kick in the "pants"), or negative physical means. Being somewhat more humane today, we generally resort only to strong language or one-upmanship. (Besides, today's individual would be likely to kick back.) Whether verbal or physical KITA is used, the result is the same: either the employee performs a specified task, or he is threatened with loss of his job.

KITA is movement, not motivation. Even society's elaborate reward system is simply positive KITA. Better salaries, fringe benefits, better communications and all the other various human relations trappings are like dog biscuits tossed out by managers to any employee performing the desired task.

A truly motivated person does a good job because it's important to him and to the institution. Motivation does not consist of threats or benefits, but of the ideas, feelings and attitudes an employee has about his job. In order to motivate your employees, you must ensure that they are correctly placed, challenged and involved in the determination of how their respective tasks are to be accomplished.

I don't mean to imply that salary, fringe benefits, good working conditions and security are not important, but they are only factors which, if present, will help to avoid dissatisfaction. By themselves they rarely motivate. If they are inadequate, however, it will be difficult to motivate anyone.

In summation, for motivation to be successful, people who are qualified and interested in the task should be selected — not the overqualified or those incapable of growing with the job as it evolves. If you are fortunate enough to recruit a creative, self-motivated person, don't frustrate that person through overmanagement. The self-motivated are already performing at their maximum. Get out of their way. Help them with feedback and technical assistance, and orient them to the goals of the organization. Broaden the abilities of those who are not self-motivated by aiding them to establish challenging goals. Do not prescribe those goals; rather, provide general guidance and let the individual determine the specifics. Allow people to participate in decisions affecting them, and let yourself

be influenced by their recommendations. Don't neglect the hygiene factors (salary, fringe benefits, etc.); no matter how much food you may eat now, you will get hungry again. Automate the repetitive jobs whenever possible. If you cannot do so, then seek to motivate the persons performing those tasks by enlarging their jobs and giving them more responsibility. Don't be afraid to take risks with people. Consider the role of change and innovation in your organization: if a change is desirable and people are involved in its testing and implementation, it can itself serve as a powerful motivator.

Finally, remember that what really motivates people and makes them happy is what they do. What makes them unhappy and turns them against their job is the situation in which they do it.

SOURCE

Information for this paper was drawn from a series of management videotapes available from Advanced Systems, Inc. (1601 Tonne Rd., Elk Grove Village, Ill. 60007). Pertinent titles in this series are:

Managing Time from the "Effective Executive Series," with Peter Drucker;
To Be Efficient and To Be Human from the "Motivation: Management for Success Series," with Frederick Herzberg;

Myths About Your Employees from the "Motivation: Management for Success Series," with Frederick Herzberg;

Theory X and Y from the "Motivation and Productivity Series," with Saul Gellerman; and

Management of Human Assets from the "Motivation and Productivity Series," with Saul Gellerman.