

Keeping the motivation going

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[Michael A. Crumpton](#), (2013) "Keeping the motivation going", Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances, The, Vol. 26 Iss: 4, pp.144 – 146

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Abstract:

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to acknowledge and provide tips for ongoing motivation needs of an organization.

Design/methodology/approach – This article discusses several examples in the literature regarding motivational elements.

Findings – This article advocates for seeking new approaches to motivating employees as financial concerns deepen.

Originality/value – This is the author's point-of-view and experience.

Keywords: Focus | Leadership | Motivation | Library Management

Article:

After many years of a tough economy and the resulting changes across the country to library organizations, vendors, institutions of higher education and state/local governments, struggling to maintain presence and effectiveness, how does one expect staff morale to be impacted? In many cases, library staff are working with reduced resources, little or no pay raises and are still expected to provide referrals and services to an increasingly demanding public. Maintaining staff morale in this type of environment can become one of biggest challenges to managing the operation.

Saul W. Gellerman, in his book *Motivation in the Real World*, defines motivation as the art of helping people to focus their minds and energies on doing their work as effectively as possible (Gellerman, 1992). In a world influenced by constant economic struggles, the key term in that

definition might be “focus”, as managers and supervisors must look for creative ways to direct employee's attentions productively. Keeping the focus on what can be accomplished instead of what can't be accomplished, or no longer sustained, can be a daunting task.

Human motivation is intricately tied to emotions. Employee motivation directly impacts social achievement goals (including those on the personal side) and is correlated to emotional intelligence. Utilizing emotional intelligence principles to enable other's self-awareness can help supervisors find answers through others. For example; identify others who are self-aware and demonstrate problem solving skills or creativity in the face of change. Put them into a position of helping others and teaching or training the elements or change that need to occur in making budget adjustments. Others might be more motivated conducting research in order to gather supporting data for decisions to be made. All of this can be motivational by allowing staff members to be part of the solution, not just focused on the problem.

Adding the point-of-view that the organization's values must be maintained is also a useful tool in keeping up the motivation. Values are motivational constructs; living up to a value fulfills a particular highly abstract goal and demonstrates a meaningful product from one's output and efforts. Verplanken and Holland (2002) propose that central values are those that make an individual define and interpret a situation, such as economic strife, so as to attend to value-related information, such as serving a constituency or patrons, which enhances the weight of such information and elicit a motivation to act.

Basic motivational techniques require managers and supervisors to play an active role in coaching others. Active coaching toward motivating employees includes:

- giving positive feedback and rewarding good behaviors;
- public recognition of efforts;
- providing incentives, even if they are non-monetary;
- leading by example and demonstrating willingness to be part of the team;
- listening to what is being said and responding appropriately; and
- asking questions, and showing interest and empathy in the details.

These basic motivation techniques are typical for managers and supervisors during normal work environments, but keeping folks motivated during years of adversity takes leadership. A continued economic issue can turn a typical manager into an effective leader depending upon

how they react and can motivate others. And although managers can be goal-oriented and problem solvers, leaders are needed who look beyond the mechanics of the situation in order to stimulate people on a personal level.

Zaleznik (1977) points out that having leadership requires having the power to influence the thoughts and actions of other people, but it comes with risks. These risks involve equating power with the ability to get immediate results, ignoring other ways to gain power and also the risk of losing self-control in the desire for power. In the case of sustaining a motivating culture, an organization that encourages its managers to take those risks and utilize their self-actualization skills to influence others is also developing leaders who can sustain motivation during duress.

Negative economic conditions can also create an environment in which people are frustrated and annoyed and to a lesser extent sometimes offended. Called workplace incivility, these are negative emotions as opposed to threats, but can still create a toxic working environment. In Stuart D. Sidle's research, he identifies workplace incivility as a growing problem of non-motivated individuals who create this problem with bad behaviors (Sidle, 2009). Managers will become disciplinarians, but it will take leaders to see the signs and take actions before formal grievances take place. And a leader's call to action will be in finding ways to motivate good behaviors from those feeling negative emotions.

Applying motivational theory

If you remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the pyramid-shaped list of needs, starting with basic needs and moving toward self-actualization, you can consider a couple of things. Motivational factors at each level of the needs hierarchy can be different. The basic needs of physiological and safety needs are typically beyond the workplace and the needs addressed are usually belonging and esteem. However; changes brought about by financial cutbacks, adjustments or redistribution of funding can also influence the level of motivational need that someone attains. For example, safety concerns might become more of an issue in a case where funding for positions or equipment is reduced. Concern about potential layoffs might invoke the need to address physiological concerns if feeding their family is at risk.

Motivation viewed within the organization structure might not account for concerns over more personal impacts of the organization's financial situation. Leaders must endeavor to learn to read

emotional signals from individuals in order to address how to motivate at whatever level of concern could be most impacted. People will always have concerns, but determining which concerns within the workplace influence a personal need is key to providing the best motivation.

Likewise with a look at Herzberg's motivation-hygiene (maintenance) theory we can apply a discussion of sustaining motivation through financial crisis. Herzberg's *The Motivation to Work* study (Herzberg, 1959) presented the role of the organization as providing maintenance of factors outside the employee's control. These factors were essential to providing the opportunity for employees to feel motivated through internalized factors such as praise, recognition or opportunities for advancement. Once again, organizational leaders can make a difference by creating a culture that supports the employees, despite changes that could make it seem less than optimal.

In summary, as libraries continue to struggle with economic and financial setbacks, looking for methods to keep library staff motivated is indeed a challenge. Not forgetting the basic motivational techniques, it also could be important to focus on individual needs that could change along the needs hierarchy. And by providing managers to opportunity to become leaders and see past standard activities, they themselves could create a work environment that sustains a motivating culture.

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