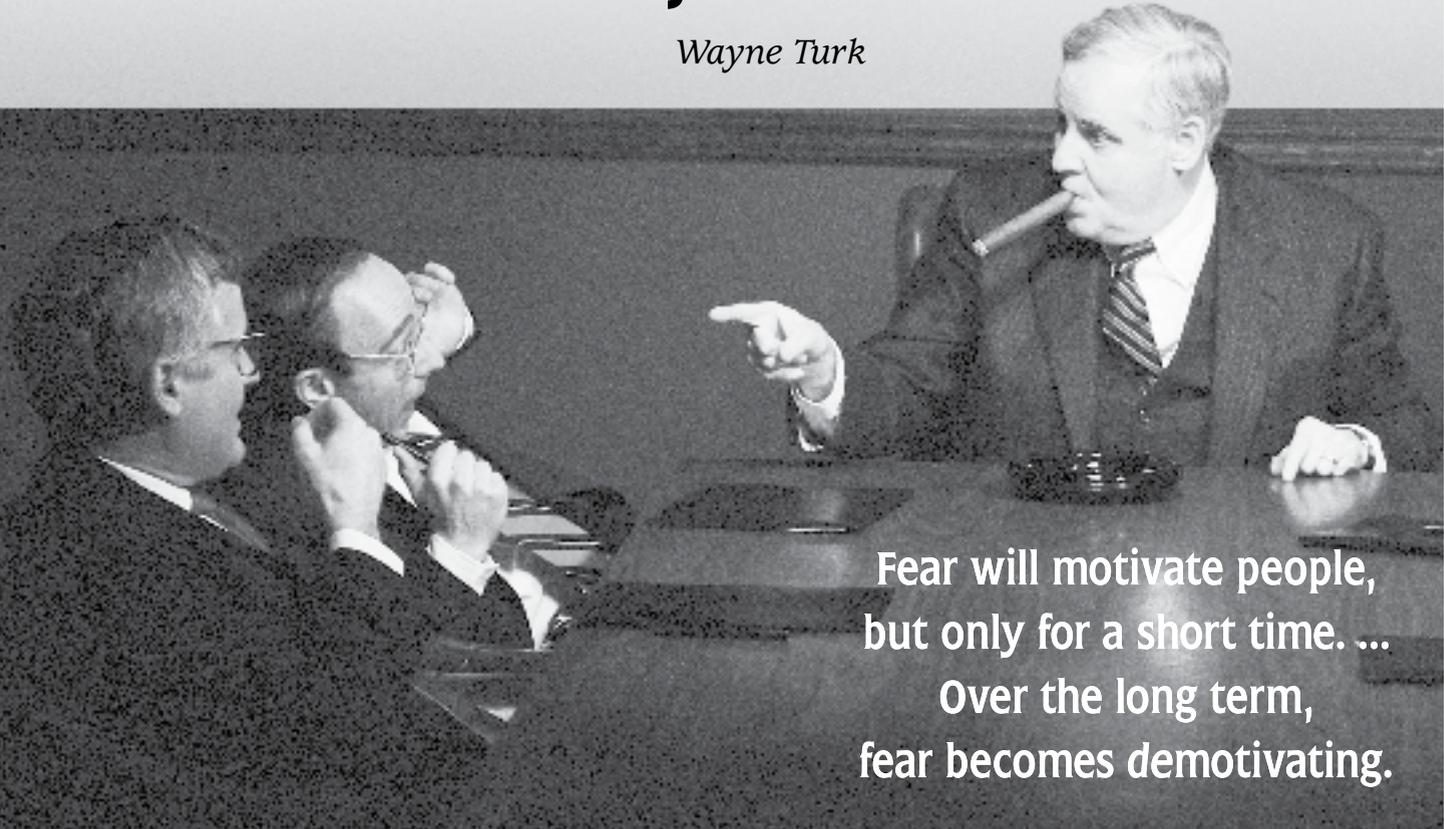


Motivate Your People for Project Success

Wayne Turk



Fear will motivate people,
but only for a short time. ...
Over the long term,
fear becomes demotivating.

Let's start with a caveat. There are books written on motivation. Throw in about a ton of articles and an equal—if not greater—weight of anecdotal “evidence.” Mix in who-knows-how-many studies and you come up with a lot of information on motivation. And (can you believe this?) much of the information is contradictory! I say this just to let you know that what follows is not necessarily the only thought on the subject. It is opinion, and in this article, you are stuck with my opinion (backed up by the opinions of others, of course). But if you do some research, you can find different ideas from those presented here.

Now for two myths:

1. Fear is a great motivator.
2. Money is a great motivator.

Oh yes, fear will motivate people, but only for a short time. When the program manager yells at his or her people, it

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might light a spark, but it doesn't last. In fact, over the long term, fear becomes demotivating. People get used to it or tired of it, and they turn it off. If they get demotivated enough, they begin looking for a different job.

Money can motivate too, but it is not high on the list of motivating factors. The interpretation is that if an employee makes enough money to meet all basic needs, more money matters less than other factors. White-collar workers who make a reasonable salary to meet their basic needs (housing, food, transportation, etc.) are more directly motivated (most studies show) by other things—time off, availability of telecommuting, recognition, working conditions, etc.

It's different on the low end of the scale. Low salaries, such as those of many blue-collar workers or service industry employees, leave workers in a tight money situation where they perceive that more money will help them meet their basic needs. Then money often becomes a motivator.

There are always exceptions. Some people out there use money as a way to keep score. They are the highly com-

petitive types who psychologically measure success through dollars.

Motivation Theories

Now that we have debunked a couple of myths, we should look at what some of the theorists have to say about motivation. As in many of my articles, we will look at theory and then the practical, but don't skip the theory. The following are very brief summaries of a few of the more famous theories—a quick review of some of your college classes, although I am sure you were listening while you were in class. But if you missed it in college, consider it an introduction.

Theory X

This is an old theory going back to at least Sigmund Freud. It says that people are lazy, hate work, avoid responsibility, have no initiative, and have no ambition. To get them to work, they must be coerced, punished, intimidated, or rewarded in some way. This is the mostly stick side of the carrot and stick approach to management. While very few modern theorists agree with this theory, it seems that there are still a number of managers who do, or at least act as if they do.

Theory Y

Attributed to Douglas McGregor, this theory says that people want to work, want to learn, and need challenges (actually self-challenges). In other words, they are looking for self-development. When a manager gives them leeway and freedom to find their own challenges and work through self-direction, the management style meets Theory Y. To many, this seems to be a soft, wimpy management style. However, it does seem to work when the group is reasonably homogeneous, especially when people can choose their own leaders. So don't ignore the thought.

Theory Z or Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow, people have five needs that dominate their behavior. When one need is satisfied, the person aspires to the next higher need. The lowest need is physiological (food, shelter, clothing) and the hierarchy ascends through safety, love, self-esteem, and self-actu-



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alization. Motivation must match the level of the hierarchical need of the individual at the time. The problem for the typical manager is knowing at which level a person is, and knowing when that person's level has changed as a result of outside circumstances.

Hygiene-Motivation Theory

Frederick Herzberg theorizes that people act according to their own self-enlightened interests. They have two types of needs: animal or hygiene needs (salary, supervision, interpersonal relations, and working conditions); and human or motivation needs (recognition, work, responsibility, and advancement). The factors in the first group can be demotivators if unsatisfactory, but have limited use as motiva-

tors. The second group are the positive motivators.

Modern Theories

Three of the most commonly discussed (OK, accepted) theories today are those of Chris Argyris, Rensis Likert, and Fred Luthans. Argyris says that organizations and jobs need to be restructured to enable individuals to develop to the fullest extent possible. This provides satisfaction and internal motivation. Likert divided management into four styles: exploitive-authoritative, benevolent-authoritative, consultative, and participative. He says that participative management (in which the employees have input in decisions, normally made in groups) satisfies the whole range of human needs and is, therefore, the most motivating. Luthans advocates a "contingency approach," where certain practices work best on certain people and certain jobs. For example, an authoritative approach works best for rigid, highly controlled, and inflexible jobs, while the opposite works with more flexible, creative jobs. In other words, fit the approach to the person and the job.

Putting Theory into Practice

The basic idea of motivation is to answer the employee's question, "What's in it for me?" That may sound a little

crass, but it's the truth. While there are general actions that hit some of the needs of most employees, there are specifics that you may have to determine for each individual.

Everyone is motivated by different things, and motivation can be affected by the age and generation of the employee. Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, Generation Yers—they want different things. Take a little time to research the differing needs of employees of different generations. What you discover should impact your motivational actions. A good article (with its reader comments) is posted at <<http://blog.sironaconsulting.com/sironasays/2007/12/our-futurex-ver.html>> .

Whatever steps you take with your employees, the first should be to find out what *really* motivates each person. Ask people, listen to them, and observe them. Here are some of the strategies for motivation that almost always work:

- Treat employees with respect
- Use good two-way communication
- Have high expectations
- Use positive reinforcement
- Employ effective discipline and punishment
- Treat all fairly
- Set work-related goals
- Satisfy employee needs
- Restructure jobs when possible
- Base rewards on job performance.

Meeting Their Needs Meets Yours

Let's look at the strategies in more detail.

Respect. Step one is to treat all your employees and others with respect. How you act toward those under your supervision and around you has an impact. It's not just those who work for you but anyone with whom you have contact—your peers; people under you; and those in positions that can be considered service or support positions, like waiters, secretaries, the mailroom staff, and so on. People notice how you treat other people. If you are rude, demanding, or demeaning to people, you demotivate them. When you treat people with respect, they will want to work with you or for you. Being respectful or nice *doesn't* mean letting people roll over you. You can be strong but tactful and polite.

How you treat a person will influence how your needs are handled or the priority applied to your work or requests. Someone whom you mistreated could even directly sabotage or undermine your work if he or she is upset enough. On the other hand, kindness and politeness can pay great benefits. Then people want to please you. You might be surprised how something as simple as a cheerful “good morning” or a polite “thank you” can help motivate your people. Being polite is not being obsequious.

Communication. Employ good two-way communication. While step one took in all those around you, we will limit the discussion on step two to those who work for you. Make sure your project team members know your goals for and your expectations of them. Communicate clearly what the each task entails and the results required. Spend time figuring out how to articulate everything clearly. Good communication—one-on-one and with the whole team—is a must for any manager.

You also need to listen to your employees. Not just, “Yeah, I hear you; now go do what I told you to do,” but *really* listen to what they have to say. Listening not only helps motivate a person, it also helps you to understand what else will motivate that person. As an added benefit, you also might get good suggestions on how to do a task better, ideas for process improvement, identification of a problem, or a resolution to a problem.

Expectations. Having and communicating high expectations for your employees is critical. If people know that you expect good things from them, they are motivated to live up to those expectations. A positive self-fulfilling prophecy works.

Reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is critical. It can be both subtle and more obvious. With today's tight budgets and the regulations within government, it may be hard to do too much that is tangible—pay raises, bonuses, cash awards, or gift certificates. If you *can* do something tangible, great. If not, perhaps a reward of time off or a more flexible schedule is possible. Maybe it is a special parking place for a specified period of time or some other similar recognition. Try to make the reward fit the desires of the employee.

Employees need to be recognized for the good things they do. What about the extra responsibility that your people have had to assume? What about overtime, especially if it is unpaid overtime? How about helping or mentoring others in the workplace? Have you recognized anyone for those types of activities? Yes, it is their job, but you have to admit that there are people on your team who go above and beyond at work. They are definitely worthy of at least a “thank you” in front of their coworkers and even your boss. Be positive, be specific, and be sincere. Sincerity is critical. Meaningless praise will get you nothing.

Discipline. On the other hand, you also have to effectively discipline those who are not doing their share or who are breaking the rules. Always try to do that privately, if possible—and sometimes it isn't. If you have people who continually shirk their duty or break rules, you may have to get rid of them. Knowing that there are going to be retributions when a line is crossed motivates people. It is not fear, but the knowledge that those doing right are rewarded and those doing wrong are disciplined.



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Fairness. All must be treated equitably. You cannot have favorites—or, shall we say, non-favorites. When people do good, point it out; if they do bad, don't ignore it. You can't let a favorite be continually late with nothing said or done if you punish someone else for the same offense. People watch for those kinds of things. Unfair treatment, good or bad, can damage motivation, morale, and productivity.

Goals. You have to set work-related goals with your people. The goals should be clear, fair, reachable (although "stretch goals" are fine), and quantifiable. You need to set the goals *with* your team members, not *for* them. Get their input. That may mean some negotiation, but talk the goals through. When people have goals, they frequently motivate themselves and find ways to meet those goals. That is especially true when there is some reward that is valuable to them.

Needs. All the things mentioned so far (and to come) are a part of "satisfy employee needs." If you don't satisfy your people's needs, you may find them leaving to work for someone else. There may be other needs that you have to consider. I mentioned tangible rewards, time off, and more flexible schedules. There's also the chance for promotion or to try something different. It could be anything. But if you can't do something, it is a good idea to let your people know and to let them know why.

Restructuring jobs. This is frequently difficult, but it can have a large impact. If you can do something to minimize or get rid of what a person perceives as the "bad" parts of a job (tasks that are redundant or boring), that is fantastic. Or if you can broaden the scope of a job to include tasks that people enjoy, want to learn, or, for some other reason, enhance the job, then do it. Again, you have to be careful. All of the required tasks have to get done, but maybe you can make them more tolerable.

Performance rewards. Base all rewards on job performance. Don't let personality play a part. Give out the kinds of rewards or recognition that you can, but do it fairly. Make sure that it is in relation to meeting goals. Do it to meet employee (and organizational) needs. And do it based on the work that they do.

With positive motivation, managing your people gets easier, and project success is more readily attainable. But motivation doesn't only apply to people on projects—it's a basic managerial requirement for success at any time.

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