



## IN PRACTICE

### December 2006

#### **Motivational Tools for Noncharismatic Leaders**

by Michael Kroth



*Michael Kroth has been studying passionate work since 1999. His latest book, [The Manager as Motivator](#), contains more principles to increase workplace motivation and includes exercises and examples. Michael is an assistant professor at the University of Idaho in Adult and Organizational Learning. You can reach him at [mkroth@uidaho.edu](mailto:mkroth@uidaho.edu).*

It doesn't take charisma to create a highly motivating work environment. In fact, charisma is not all it is cracked up to be. It's overrated, an excellent motivator doesn't need it, and sometimes it causes more harm than good. Managers can be excellent motivators even if they are shy or unable to give inspiring speeches.

So what does it take to truly motivate employees? While preparing my latest book, *The Manager as Motivator*, I found seven easy-to-understand principles that managers can apply in the workplace every day. They are all based on research and real examples. Here are three that supervisors can put to use right now.

#### **1. The More You Care, The More They Will Care**

The goal for this principle is to develop "beyond the call of duty" motivation, and the leadership practice is "Give a Darn!" Research shows that when employees feel cared about, they work harder and stay at a company longer.

First, treat employees fairly. People know when decisions are skewed to favor a select few. Tell the leaders you work with to be evenhanded.

Second, let employees know they matter. Highly motivating supervisors let employees know they are needed, value them even when things go badly, spend time with them and resources on them.

#### **2. Do What You Love and the Motivation Will Follow**

The goal for this principle is to find work that creates its own motivation. The leadership practice is to design enjoyable work.

Work should not be drudgery. Every job has tasks that aren't fun, but when work is enjoyable overall the job of motivation becomes much easier.

Part of the challenge is that enjoyment is not the same for everyone. My sister, Mary, loves working with numbers. I love teaching and public speaking. Others loathe being in front of a crowd or hate numbers. It is the supervisor's job to discover what each employee enjoys doing.

Work is enjoyable when the act of doing it is pleasurable. It makes sense to provide that joy, but many supervisors bring with them the perception that work is, well, work. To those folks, the idea of work as

fun signifies laziness. But there are many suitable ways to make work more pleasurable and productive.

Encourage play at work. Play develops skills, relationships, and different ways of thinking. A challenge is less intimidating when viewed as a problem to figure out. One company uses games to learn new company policies and procedures, with many rewards and lots of recognition. Instead of boring, the work is soaring.

### **3. Willpower Is the Engine for Goal Pursuit**

The goal for this principle is to sustain motivation. The leadership practice is to use strategies to strengthen and support willpower, and to reduce the need for it.

What good is a highly motivated employee today if tomorrow he or she is halfhearted? Charismatic leaders are often great at getting people hyped up, but are poor about follow through. Have you ever been to a motivational speech (or departmental retreat), returned to work pumped up, and three days later found it was business as usual? The trick is to sustain motivation. Here are just two ideas to help your managers maintain employee motivation.

**Find Several Reasons to Stay Motivated.** One way to reduce the need for sheer willpower is to uncover more than one reason to complete a goal. Exercising, for example, is easier when I have several objectives or rewards. Having more energy and stamina, losing weight, meeting new friends or socializing, living longer, and becoming healthier are just five reasons to exercise. Leaders can reduce the need for pure willpower by finding multiple reasons to accomplish a challenge.

**Develop Habits of Success.** Highly motivating managers create a culture of success in their departments. They don't put forth challenges, even easy ones, and then allow people to skate by them. They start with goals that can be accomplished and then increase the challenge, expecting success all along the way. Soon, being in the habit of succeeding makes sustaining motivation much easier.

### **Any Manager Can Do It**

If you develop or coach leaders who can't seem to inspire bubbles out of a soda can, remember that any manager can learn the skills needed to be highly motivating. You just have to give them the tools for noncharismatic leaders!

© 2006 ASTD, Alexandria, VA. All rights reserved.