

# *The Manager's Role in Motivating Performance*

by Jeffrey Leventry

(October 17, 2022)



Over the past 8 years I have taught approximately 12 courses in the Management Department at The College of New Jersey, Rider University and Drexel University. One of the common themes that pervades my courses is the concept of motivation, and how it ultimately drives employee performance. In my experience as a Manager and Business Leader, I recognize that those who succeed in business are highly motivated to perform their roles in organizations, and achieve performance objectives that produce bottom line results.

I also realize that Managers utilize many different approaches to motivate their employees – some more effective than others. In fact, one of the main responsibilities of a Manager is to devise ways to motivate Team members to produce superior performance, individually and collectively.

Hall of Fame baseball player Joe DiMaggio offered a unique perspective on motivation by arguing that, “Motivation is something that nobody else can give you. Others can help motivate you, but basically it must come from you and it must be a constant desire to do your very best at all times and under any circumstances.”

Based upon my business experience, I believe the motivation to perform is a combination of both intrinsic (internal) factors and extrinsic (external) forces that work together to yield a positive outcome.

## **What do we mean by employee motivation?**

Management experts have defined this concept in different ways, based upon their research about what motivates human behavior.

I prefer the definition suggested by Kathleen O’Donnell (an employee communications and culture expert). She says: “Employee motivation is the level of energy, commitment, and creativity that a company’s workers bring to their jobs.

Your motivated employees are the ones who roll out of bed almost every morning feeling excited to go to work and take on new challenges.” She also believes that “they look forward to learning new skills, stretching their capabilities, and taking on new responsibilities.”

Interestingly, motivation is derived from the Latin word, “movere” which literally means movement. This implies taking action or setting things in motion, rather than remaining passive. This correlates with Kathleen’s definition and suggests that employees should use their energy and drive to actively perform their roles in the organization.

### **How can employee motivation be encouraged?**

While it is true that extrinsic rewards such as compensation typically motivate employees to perform their best (since it is normally a sign of how much the company values them), I suggest that a Manager’s toolkit should also include other proven approaches that are equally successful in motivating performance.

Based upon my experience, here are several ways that Managers can motivate their employees to perform:

- First and foremost, treat your employees with respect and facilitate meaningful relationships with your direct reports. Surveys have shown that employees who feel respected and valued by their managers are significantly more engaged and productive at work.
- Second, include your employees in goal setting so they have a “say” in their performance objectives for the year, vis-à-vis the goals the manager envisions for them. When employees understand the goals of the department or organization and how their actions directly impact progress toward those goals, research indicates that this positively influences employee engagement and motivation.
- Third, recognize a job well done and offer honest praise when an employee accomplishes important tasks or performance objectives. Positive feedback helps employees feel valued in their roles and motivates continued performance at the highest level.
- Fourth, encourage autonomy when an employee has demonstrated that they can handle it, and reward them with increased authority to make business decisions. This reinforces a healthy respect for the employee’s continued professional development – including an enhanced employee skill set.
- Fifth, consider both job enrichment and job enlargement to keep employees engaged and more productive. Job enrichment refers to making jobs more interesting and varied so employees experience feelings of responsibility, achievement, growth and recognition in their role. Job enlargement is a process in which a person's responsibilities are expanded to include more opportunities to add value to the organization. Both approaches have proven to achieve success and pay huge dividends (individually and organizationally) according to articles published in the Harvard Business Review.
- Finally, ensure a healthy work-life balance for your employees so they understand that you respect their need to balance work versus free time with family and friends, or to pursue personal interests. In addition, consider flexible work arrangements (including working from home) so employees can address outside demands made upon them. The pandemic has demonstrated that remote workers can be very productive and accomplish performance objectives as well (or even better) than commuting to an office environment every day.

## What are the benefits derived from motivated employees?

There are many reasons why employee motivation matters so much in an organization. In fact, enhanced employee motivation is directly linked to high levels of employee engagement which yields bottom-line results for the company.

Some of the critical benefits of cultivating motivated employees include the following:

- **Productivity and Performance** – It generates greater productivity and better overall performance in the workforce so that employees are more efficient and effective in their roles at the firm. This results in not only the achievement of individual performance goals, but the accomplishment of Team and organizational objectives as well.
- **Creativity and Innovation** – It produces greater levels of creativity and innovation as employees readily take on new challenges and overcome obstacles that stand in the way of success. Employees utilize their high level of motivation to effectively deal with business uncertainty and creatively solve difficult problems that pervade today's business environment.
- **Commitment and Loyalty** – It supports higher levels of commitment and loyalty to the organization. Motivated employees normally put their "best foot forward" and exert more effort toward their work to achieve agreed-upon business objectives.
- **Employee Satisfaction and Development** – It fosters employee satisfaction as they are given opportunities to excel in their role with the firm. Satisfied employees typically pursue professional development and the enhancement of their skill set, which enables career advancement in the organization – including well-deserved promotions.
- **Absenteeism and Retention Rates** – It encourages employees to show up at work on time, every day and be ready to tackle the tasks that await them. Thus, absenteeism is lowered and costly employee turnover is reduced or avoided altogether. Simply stated, motivated employees tend to stay with the firm for longer tenures and employee retention rates remain strong or continue to rise.
- **Company Culture and Reputation** – It fuels the development of a collaborative corporate culture that gives the company a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Employees share their excitement with other members of their social network which enhances the firm's reputation and makes it easier to attract top-notch talent that helps the company grow.

In conclusion, stimulating employee motivation is one of the primary jobs of today's Managers, and those who succeed in this aspect of their role guarantee the success and sustainability of the organization. Fortunately, the Manager's toolkit is full of effective ways to motivate employee performance, so it is up to the Manager to decide which ones will be most constructive to accomplish individual and Team goals.

If your firm is challenged with equipping Managers with proven approaches for motivating employee performance, I would encourage you to consider the ones that I have articulated above so you can reap the tangible benefits that accrue from a highly motivated Team!