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What Really Motivates People?

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When I'm talking to leaders, the conversation around how to motivate their team typically comes up whether it's a top performer who needs to be motivated to stay within the organization (and not lost to the competition) to middle performers who would do even better if they would take things to the next level. So what actually motivates people?

Based on 15 years of coaching experience and closely observing human behavior in the workplace I have uncovered the 3 key factors (and their 6 suby factors) that are the building blocks of the holy grail: motivation. Here they are.

Factor #1 – Security. Humans are driven, even Maslow agrees, to first fulfill basic needs which include food, shelter and safety. In the context of the workplace, security is identified by 2 suby factors: "compensation" and "job security." If compensation needs are adequately met, then you can check this box. If it is not fully met, it is a source of motivation for people. If you want better performance, you may want to offer stronger incentives and bonus. Next...job security. Regardless of the shape that the economy is in, we are all motivated to work for a company that is thriving and not going under and motivated by knowing that our performance is adequate enough that we have job security. If your employees are getting paid enough and know they have job security, then you've met 2 of their 6 needs.

Factor #2 – Identity. Humans are social creatures and driven by the need to "affiliate" with things they care about. Given that we spend most of our lifetime working, we are motivated by working for a company, department or team we feel proud to tell about friends and family about – a winning team. "How cool is it that Joe works for Facebook or Twitter?" We want to have an affiliation for the companies and teams we work with and the change they are making in the world. The second suby factor related to identity is "title." Some of us are motivated by that next promotion to get the title that we deserve and to be recognized for that. It will become part of a new identity we strive to embody.

Factor #3 – Stimulation. Humans desire to be challenged and stimulated. In the workplace, we are looking for "new and exciting opportunities" that keep us engaged and stretch us to grow. Specifically, we like to work on new and cool projects/initiatives or to be put on task force that will change how we operate internally. Who doesn't want to be on the project that will change the way we experience mobile apps? Chances are that some of your direct reports, particularly the ones who are high performers need

that level of stimulation in order to stay engaged and continue their career with the company. The second factor related to stimulation is “mastery in a new domain.” We all want to learn new skills and gain mastery, and then move onto to learn something else. It not only keeps our skills fresh, but keeps us relevant and more marketable in the world of work. It is only when we have mastery over an area that we feel we are performing at our best and can have a sense of autonomy and not a need to rely on others nor be micromanaged.

So next time you have a 1-- - 1 with a direct report or are wondering how to best motivate your employees, ensure that you have all 3 factors and 6 sub-- - factors considered. While some people are more excited in certain areas than others during the course of their lifetime or careers, if you are able to ensure they have all 6 sub-- - factors met, you are in a good position as a leader.

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