



## **Leadership Isn't About Employees Running Through Brick Walls**

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When self-help authors and so-called leadership experts talk about motivation, they almost always reference methods and tricks that can be utilized to motivate employees. They insist that if company leaders can push the right buttons and pull magic levers, their teams will run through brick walls for them. Leadership is not a demonstrative activity. You are truly a leader if you have willing followers, not conscripts. Leadership is not an ego contest.

The undeniable fact is that motivation is already baked into each employee. The best leaders out there (and they are few and far between) take the time to understand what inherently motivates their team and employees. When they know these particular motivators, managers can then begin the process of removing the bricks that are in the way to provide a sustainable path for success.

What sounds like the better approach to you?

Using driving forces to get people to do what you want happens all the time. You can threaten them with all kinds of “sticks” that scare them into action (this is a form of extrinsic motivation). But this isn't tapping into their motivation, it's tapping into their fear. It's not sustainable and it doesn't lead to a healthy work environment. Fear ultimately destroys culture. Any leader who ever said they would rather be feared than loved is rationalizing or compensating for major deficiencies in their character.

The more popular approach to using driving forces is through the use of so-called carrots. These carrots are also known as extrinsic motivation (motivation derived from external sources). The key here is the word “external”. Any time you rely on outside factors to drive activity you are doing so on borrowed time. Sure, anyone will do something for enough money or the lure of an exotic trip to the coast of Italy or a new set of Ping golf clubs. But are they doing it for the right reasons? By offering these incentives (form of a bribe), you are telling your people that the work in itself isn't worth doing unless there is a physical payoff. This also leads to entitlement.



Employees start to view these extrinsic incentives as core compensation. When you turn them off, people perceive it as something being taken away. These types of incentives are also easy for people to translate into tangible dollars and cents.

Example: Imagine you work 20 hours of overtime one week to meet an important deadline for a critical project. In your mind, you feel a sense of purpose; a collective and collaborate spirit to meet this goal with others team members. There are high fives amongst your colleagues when the project bid is finally submitted late Thursday evening. Then imagine your manager walks over to your desk the next morning and hands you a \$20 Starbucks gift card for your efforts. What is your automatic thought process? Every extra hour you worked late and missed dinner with your family was only worth one measly dollar per hour. If that's not demoralizing, I don't know what is. Extrinsic rewards are put forth with good intentions. But like the saying goes, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

So, if sticks and carrots aren't the right recipe for instilling sustainable motivation, what is? There is a much easier and sustainable path for tapping into the motivation that we already mentioned is living and breathing within your employees. It's called intrinsic motivation (motivation that is derived inwardly). Decades of research has shown that every person has inherent motivators that are unmovable from day to day, week to week, month to month and even year to year.

Example: Take collaboration/teamwork. You know in your heart of hearts whether you are someone who thrives from working and ideating with others. You love to be part of a collective process. You might have an off day here or there, but you are at your best and find flow in your work when you have the chance to collaborate.

If you know this about your team members, it only makes sense to provide opportunities and resources to organically allow this to happen. In this sense, it doesn't require you to change the person. They already have the motivational DNA of collaboration. As a manager, you only have to make small tweaks to the employees' environment to create this motivational alignment. It doesn't have to cost you anything except taking the time to understand what actually makes your employees tick. Seems almost too simple. Why isn't every organization tapping into the intrinsic motivation of their employees? Great question.

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