

Career Rx

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Motivation - Value Driven or Dangling Carrot?

I overheard a joke on the train the other day: "How do you stop a consultant from working hard? Hire him!" While this may sound like something that could come from a Henny Youngman routine, it did raise some questions about motivation. Theories of management and work motivation distinguish between two kinds of rewards—extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic rewards are ones such as money and verbal reinforcement which are mediated outside of the person, whereas intrinsic rewards are mediated within the person. We say a person is intrinsically motivated to perform an activity if there is no apparent reward except the activity itself or the feelings which result from the activity.

Most of the theories of work motivation assume that the effects of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are additive. Some research indicates the opposite. It was reported that a person's intrinsic motivation to perform an activity actually decreased when he received contingent monetary payments, threats of punishment for poor performance, or negative feedback about his performance. Non-contingent monetary payments left intrinsic motivation unchanged, and verbal reinforcements appeared to enhance intrinsic motivation.

Cognitive dissonance theory attempts to explain these results. This theory proposes that it is difficult or uncomfortable to have two contradictory ideas simultaneously. The idea that you are doing something for pleasure can be in direct conflict with the idea that you are doing it for pay. The idea that there needs to be an extrinsic motivation can cause a person to reduce the perceived pleasure of an activity in order to make it fit into the category of a job rather than a passion. This theory can work in an affirmative manner also. The Ben Franklin effect is an example of this. Franklin noted that "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged." In other words, if someone has been nice to you, they must like you because it would be inconsistent for them to do a person a favor that they did not like. Politicians have paid a lot of attention to this phenomenon in recent elections. It appears that if you contribute to a person's campaign, you are far more likely to vote for them, Even if that contribution is only a quarter. To not vote for them would make you feel like a hypocrite.

These aspects of human nature can be useful in several ways. As a person subject to the rules of human nature, you need to monitor your own situation to make adjustments for possible negative effects. It is easy to consciously rationalize that the best possible situation is to be well compensated for something that you love to do. When a passion starts to disappear, introspection can sometimes reveal a subtle cause. If you understand the cause of a motivational problem, you can adjust your outlook.

Making use of this phenomenon suggests that we reach out to others for help. Ben Franklin arrived at his observations regarding this aspect of human nature when he asked a political rival to do him a personal favor. The favor was nothing more than asking his rival to loan him a book. Ben made a close friend and supporter for life as a result of having the rival doing the favor. The rival, by doing the favor, must therefore have liked Ben. Work relationships exist on a lot of different levels. Making allies at work can often be accomplished by getting someone to do something on your behalf.

Pay for performance is a commonly used motivational technique in today's marketplace. There is often considerable confusion among managers when the result of a performance based system fails to achieve the desired results. In many professions where people are highly intrinsically motivated, tying pay to performance may actually reduce productivity. People working in research, education and the arts are less likely to be extrinsically motivated than people in the financial services and manufacturing fields. If the magnitude of the compensation is not particularly significant, the motivational value will be minimal and the potential for negative effects will be greater. The effects of pay for performance should be carefully vetted to make sure that they will achieve the desired effect. As a manager or as the

individual contributor, do you know what is expected and how to deliver the expected performance? Is your organization rewarding the desired behaviors that yield the best results?

Most of our best work is driven out of our intrinsic motivational energy. When we turn a hobby into a money making effort, sometimes this takes the joy out of the hobby. Think of positions held over your career, what about them energized you? Where was the motivation coming from – within or externally, such as a dangling carrot? Typically intrinsic motivation lasts and sustains you. Intrinsic motivation remains with you as it is generated from a core value. Watch for the next article which will explore motivation and core values and how this plays into our career goals.

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Lisa's extensive human resources and coaching experience with Fortune 500 companies, small enterprises, medium-sized firms, and non-profit organizations gives her the unique ability to bring together wide-ranging perspectives on career transitions, executive and leadership development. She has consulted with a wide variety of sectors — consumer goods, financial services, healthcare, media and entertainment, pharmaceutical and life sciences, publishing, professional services, technology, and non-profit. Lisa has a passion for motivational speaking, conducts career forums, and provides executive and career coaching.

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