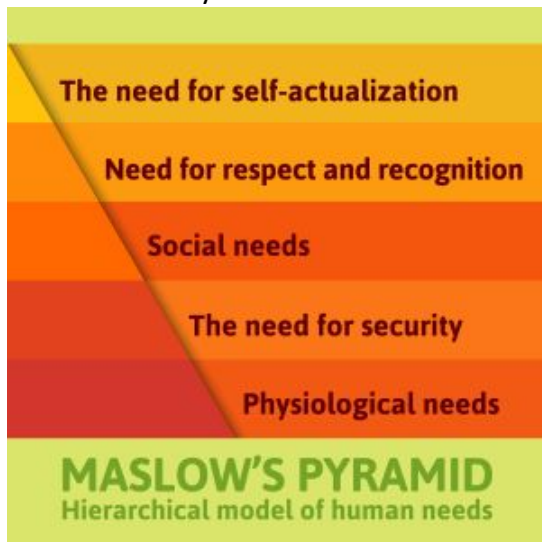


How do you motivate your team ?

I was fascinated by the book **“Why Motivating People Doesn’t Work ... and What Does.”** written by Susan Fowler (Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. San Francisco)

The author corroborates the notion that the ‘Carrot and Stick’ approach does not work and it is best to develop intrinsic factors to motivate people to do better. Of course, extrinsic rewards work to a point, but how far can an organization go in advancing pay, extending benefits, and offering incentives to enhance output. The fact is, motivation via bonuses, recognition as employee of the month, highest achiever, or flex time to accommodate an employee’s personal need may work in the short term. However, many studies have concluded that overall, these types of incentives do not contribute towards achieving long term goals or developing competitive advantage.

There are many theories that contribute to our understanding of motivation and we will



review some of them within this paper. The question is, “How can we use the concepts within these theories in a simplistic way to achieve our organizational goals in a timely manner?”

What methodology can be found to provide the best ROI and utilize intrinsic factors, to foster greater motivation and continuous improvement for each of our employees, our teams, and our organization as a whole?

At one time, managers believed the reason motivating people didn’t work is that motivation is something an employee either has or does not have. If this were to be the

case, we should segregate the two groups and develop separate action plans for each.

Other thought leaders advocate that adhering to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory gives us the answer to employee motivation. Maslow stated, once the lower basic human needs of self -sustenance and safety are satisfied, we can then motivate members to reach for their higher needs such as obtaining social acceptance, internal esteem, higher status or recognition, and finally to achieve ones’ full potential and self-fulfillment. The questions are:

- What and how much will it take to saturate an employee’s lower level needs?
- How can we measure when each employee has satisfied his/her lower level needs?
- When is it best to appeal to the upper level within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory?

Frederick Herzberg’s Motivation Hygiene Theory proposes an individual’s relationship towards work is a basic one, and an individual’s attitude towards this work can very well determine that person’s success or failure. Herzberg conducted a study investigating what people want from their jobs. Results indicated that ‘intrinsic’ factors such as

achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth were all related to job satisfaction. (Organizational Behavior, Third Canadian Edition, Robbins/Langton)

Edwin Locke proposed that intentions to work toward a goal are a major source of work motivation. The 'Goal Setting Theory' proposes that specific and difficult goals that are



deemed to be attainable, have reasonable timelines attached, and have adequate resources available, lead to strong motivation and higher performance (Organizational Behavior, Third Canadian Edition, Robbins/Langton). Thus the use of the familiar MBO (Management by Objectives) Programs have considerable merit in motivating employees to achieve set goals.

"The workplace can play an important part in either enhancing or detracting from one's level of motivation. We become motivated or demotivated depending on the degree to which our psychological needs are satisfied. We are motivated when we perceive we have choices, when we feel what we are doing is of our own volition, when we are the source of our own actions, and when we feel we have some choice and control over the work we do and its' outcomes." (S. Fowler)

A powerful way to bring all of the above to fruition is to integrate Action Learning into the workplace environment.

Action Learning (AL) involves a small diverse group (4-8 persons) who come together to solve an important personal or organizational problem and learn while so doing.

At the onset, within an AL group, all members may not be motivated to perform at a high level or even at any level because they doubt the process. However, the group forms very quickly and moves to the performing stage bypassing to a great extent the stages of storming and norming as described in Tuckman's model of group development. This is attributable to the selection of group members that have a diverse knowledge base. Management has professed the need for each of these individuals to help solve an important and often complex problem and thus the group's entire focus is on problem solving. Motivation rapidly develops at a high level, because in using AL the group's task is not just to develop a problem solution, but often the group itself is involved in implementing that solution. Therefore, the motivational level of each participant is enhanced because what they are doing is specific, meaningful, attainable, relevant, and timely.

It is interesting to note, that using AL to solve important organizational problems supports the many points that Herzberg suggests are necessary to bring about employee motivation. Group members are challenged to solve a real problem. By so doing, they are helping others in the group as well as the organization as a whole. The opportunity to receive rewards exists because group members are involved in implementing the solution. Solving an important problem is an achievement and brings about recognition from management. Once the group has solved its first problem using AL the members

Team Development



become more comfortable with the process. This in turn gives each member more confidence in themselves which enables them to tackle more difficult problems. There is an old expression “Responsibilities Gravitate to Persons Who Can Shoulder Them, and Power Flows to Those Who Know How”. An Action Learning group’s ability to assume responsibility in problem solving and solution implementation does showcase the group’s capabilities. Undertaking more complex problems resulting in breakthrough thinking and valued solutions places the AL team in a high demand position. These intrinsic factors will contribute to team members rising to the highest motivational plane.

As written by Susan Fowler, “the workplace can play an important part in either enhancing or detracting from one’s level of motivation”. When an Action Learning team assembles, the members set their own norms based on what the group agrees to adhere to. It is the group that decides what is acceptable and what is not in regard to interaction one with the other. They also follow two simple rules which along with the norms set the parameters for how the group will function.

Rule 1 – Statements will only be made in response to a question. Questions can be asked of anyone in the group not just to the problem presenter.

Rule 2 – The AL Coach can intervene at any time when there is an opportunity for learning, and to manage the time established for the AL set.

The group has choices on how they wish to approach the problem. Through the use of the questioning process they determine the ‘real cause’ of the problem. Team members understand they are in control and they alone can decide how they wish to move forward.

They are a source of their own actions and its outcomes.

The workplace can and will enhance and maintain a high level of motivation within employees when Action Learning is incorporated as part of:

- Organizational problem solving
- Team and leadership development
- Building trust between members and management
- Decision making
- Desire to improve one's competitive advantage

Written by

Philip Cohen, MBA PALC

President, WIAL-Canada Inc.