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MOTIVATIONAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

“What can I do to motivate (insert employee name)?”

Undoubtedly, this is the most common personnel management question I receive. It's a great question but also difficult and complex. It's easily the most researched and written-about question in organizational behavior.

Let's discuss the question by making three key observations:

1. In a technical sense, the answer to the question is “you can't.” Technically, all motivation is self-motivation. For example, I'm the only one who can motivate myself. Don't be alarmed. Although true, this reality doesn't stop you from influencing your employees' motivation levels. But remember, your task is to provide an environment in which your employee will choose to be motivated. Think about the analogy of sports coaches. They can't play the game, but they can teach skills and develop strategies and tactics to enable players to succeed when playing a game. Similarly, superintendents can provide the goals, rewards and culture in which your employees will choose to be motivated.

2. Decades of motivation research haven't given us an exact recipe for the ideal motivational environment for employees. However, there are principles – often differing from common practice – that provide excellent guidance. There's more about this research below.

3. Within the general guidelines of the research, each employee is unique when it comes to providing a motivational environment. Some are self-motivated and seemingly (but not correctly) need little attention from their supervisors. Others retain motivation with constant encouragement and compliments. Still, others require stiff consequences to motivate them to refrain from unacceptable behavior (such as tardiness) and remain focused on excellent work.

Author Marcus Buckingham says great

managers discover what's unique about each person and capitalize on it. What you must do to motivate employees can be analogous to putting greens. Each green has a uniqueness that must be recognized and responded to before a course will exceed golfer expectations consistently. Similarly, there are motivation principles that must be supplemented with knowledge about each individual's uniqueness to achieve a motivated golf course maintenance staff.

Remember your task is to provide an environment in which your employees will choose to be motivated.

Perhaps the most frequently referenced motivation theory is psychologist Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory. The first set of factors, called maintenance or hygiene factors, is crucial to employees because a lack of these items causes dissatisfaction among employees. These factors include:

- Economic factors;
- Security needs;
- Social needs;
- Working conditions; and
- Status.

All managers recognize the importance of these factors. However, most believe that providing fair levels of these factors will provide an environment that motivates most employees. Herzberg's theory maintains that fair levels of these factors will eradicate dissatisfaction largely, but these factors don't create a motivational work environment.

A different set of factors provides the environment to motivate employees. Herzberg's motivators augmented with suggestions for applying them to a golf course

maintenance staff are:

- **Feelings of personal accomplishment.** Just as motivation is personal, so is accomplishment. This is where setting goals or assisting employees to set them becomes crucial. The feeling of personal accomplishment occurs when set goals are met and exceeded, or even come close to amid difficult circumstances. Without goals, it's difficult for employees to feel satisfied. For example, satisfaction can be felt from something as simple as checking off completed items on a to-do list.

- **Recognition for achievement.** Recognition through positive feedback, compliments and reward programs is motivating and reinforces successful behavior. Few managers capitalize sufficiently on this motivator. We are trained to identify problems and, in fact, turf responsibilities require that we excel at identifying problems. For most of us, however, explicitly looking for positives seems unnatural. That, however, is a key part of your supervisory role and is instrumental to building a motivational environment.

- **A sense of importance to the business.** When talking to employees, I've often been amazed at the magnitude of their positive response when they receive a hat, shirt or jacket bearing the name of the course or organization at which they work. It isn't the hat, shirt or jacket that's important, it's the message it sends. However, this is where dissatisfiers (pay, working conditions, treatment) can come into play. If major dissatisfiers are present, they won't be motivational because employees don't feel they're important to the organization.

Other Herzberg motivators include challenging work, achieving increased responsibility, access to information and involvement in decision-making.

Here are three comments about motivating employees to think about:

- Only your employees can decide their level of motivation.
- Only you can establish the environment that will shape that decision.
- Great managers discover what's unique about each person and capitalize on it. **GC**