

Performance Management Company

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Stuff

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This newsletter: Roadblocks *Empowerment* & Motivation!

This newsletter focuses on managing and minimizing roadblocks as they impact organizational performance as it relates to individual and group motivation in the workplace.

A couple of times this week, I have put forth some of my comments in different threads on LinkedIn and on a couple of blogs on the subject of empowerment as it relates to performance and motivation. Oftentimes, managers do not pay enough attention to the perceptions of the workers as they relate to getting things done, while trying to drive their behavior from the outside.

Being Roadblocked is Pretty Easy. It is also quite de-motivating.

The Big Picture:

If you are like me, you are probably overwhelmed with data about the current state of the workplace as it comes to themes of motivation, performance, and accomplishment. The research says that is highly likely that your management team is generating far too much compliance and far too little engagement, especially among the bottom 50% of your workforce. And there is a wide variety of statistics to prove this (see some of my other newsletters).

And there is a continual apparent perception that companies need to

provide external motivation to people so as to get them to perform.

What Scott thinks about all this:

I think that the supposedly simple concept of extrinsic motivation – adding some specific incentives congruently linked to particular measures of accomplishment -- has a LOT more to do with current performance than one might think. And not all of it is good. There are some better ways to accomplish your overall goals than simply adding more extrinsic rewards.

First, people know who is performing in accordance with the measured results at the top and at the bottom. We often see numbers in posted results on bulletin boards as well as in individual recognition of performance in group meetings and similar. There are few secrets.

So, there is obviously the extrinsic reward itself operating on some individuals but also the extrinsic “public peer pressure” kinds of things. In some workplaces, the people *support* performance but I have also seen some situations where good results of the above-average are actually *punished* by average and below average employees by way of snide remarks and sometimes in practical jokes and even sabotage.

Top performers just tend to be top performers. If they have the skills to do the job, they generally demonstrate those skills in effective ways. A top performer in one job will often be a top performer in a different job – or they will be very frustrated because they are unable to perform that task for some reason (skill, knowledge, external forces, etc.)

Similarly, the below average performers tend to carry those same levels of performance from one job to another.

It perpetuates:

So, why is it that so many managers tend to think that external motivators are

effective for the low performers? Well, it is simply because they were promoted to their jobs from the top of the performance curve – they tend to be the kinds of people who perform. Often, they can be extrinsically motivated (but it is not always necessary).

But those same extrinsic rewards, as Dan Pink and long before him, Alfie Kohn, have clearly shown, work poorly. The research says that extrinsic rewards are NOT good motivators for many kinds of intellectual, creative, or skill-focused jobs. Dan Pink says that it is the nature of people to seek purpose and mastery. They will naturally accomplish this. Using extrinsic incentives only makes this whole process a lot more complicated.

In fact, some top performers seem almost embarrassed by these extrinsic rewards.

(I assume that we can all ignore the issues of extrinsic rewards and motivated behavior by Wall Street – many of those top-performing people are not operating within the normal bounds of human behavior and we can see that in a variety of different ways. Look at the issues of the mortgage defaults and the behavior of those

individuals who were involved in so many of the shady deals. We DO know that extrinsic rewards can also drive unethical or even illegal kinds of activities in a portion of the population...)

I would suggest that you consider the reality that most people WANT to do a good job, and that what you need to do is discover ways to remove the roadblocks that get in their way, look to provide the skill training that they might need, increase the level of teamwork and collaboration in the workplace, increase the awareness of the Best Practices that work to impact high levels of performance, create effective feedback systems to give people information that allows them to correct performance deficiencies, and look toward allowing the intrinsic reward systems that already exist to operate more effectively.

One way that we can accomplish more is to realize that many of the low and average performers do not lack the skills or even the motivation to perform at higher levels. What is happening is that these people often have histories of low performance and thus they hold low expectations of themselves.

In addition, it is common for them to perceive that they encounter more roadblocks than the top performers perceive.

If we were to ask people to list the things that get in the way, one gets fewer from the top performers than from the average ones. And we also observe that the poor performers are often even reluctant to participate in the discussion, at least at first. Only when they get comfortable or build up more trust in the facilitator do they begin to share their ideas.

The Reality is that many of the low and average performers are un-empowered = roadblocked.

And, we think that the solution for this is: really straightforward.

(Note: I have written extensively on roadblocks and dis-un-empowerment on my websites and blog over the past 10 years. A search of the site will uncover more ideas, tools and thinking.)

Many, if not most organizations, will talk about "empowerment" as a motivator and often even embed the word into their mission statements. They talk as if they can actually accomplish this and implement improvement and change simply by "empowering our people."

Sorry, but most people are UN-empowered. Statistics show that maybe 30% of employees are engaged--defined as being actively and emotionally involved with their work and the company. It is obvious that the situation should be improved (intentional spelling error).

The good thing is that it is EASY to talk about empowering others. But go ahead-- EMPOWER ME TO DO SOMETHING. ANYTHING. You just cannot do it. It is not your choice and you have no influence on me. One person cannot empower another. (Heck, I did have two teenagers years ago -- I was going to say "different teenagers" but I realize that the phrase is redundant).

So, leaping toward the actionable and intuitively non-obvious reality, I propose that one of the roles of any manager -- and one of the things that they can do and that has a wide variety of positive impacts on people and performance -- is to do something I call:

Dis-Un-Empowerment

If so many are un-empowered, what actions of a manager might serve to remove or modify that situation so as to remove those things that people think or choose to allow to get in the way of them acting empowered? Why not ask them what gets in the way and then take appropriate actions to remove it or change their perceptions about what roadblocks really exist?

Sound like fun? ❄️

Coaching. Some thoughts

One issue with any coaching is the issue of implied criticism. *"You are not doing this well..."*

And we know that any change is difficult. Change is resisted (Dilbert: *"Change is good. You go first."*)

My model of change is a simple one, based on teams and incremental improvement. There are four steps, each independent of the other and any of which will increase the likelihood that change will occur:

- attractiveness of the vision of the future
- current level of discomfort with the way things are, now
- individual or group's previous success with change
- peer support for the change

Teams and individuals need an attractive vision. Having them share in its creation is valuable if it can be integrated: "Nobody ever washes a rental car." Some ownership / involvement / engagement is essential, in my humble opinion (and based on 30+ years of experience in organizational and individual development).

People need to have some level of discomfort with the way things are (Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance fits nicely in here). Many ways to create it but if it does not occur, change is less likely. Having a vision can help.

If there is a history of failure, generating future behavior is reduced. If that individual or group feels like past efforts are successful, future change is easier and more likely. One can start to create a previous success if they

start tomorrow and look back in two days.

Peer support cuts both ways. If you can get them working together with you, that peer pressure can support that future alignment of the rogue, in most cases. Lots of research has been done on the influence of others on decision-making.

SO, I use these Square Wheels cartoons as a way of addressing (attacking?) the above. I show the cartoon unhooked: "How might this cartoon represent how most organizations really work." IN that way, I avoid any implied criticism of how things are done currently -- I let THEM project their ideas onto the image of the wagon rolling on Square Wheels with a puller and with pushers and with a cargo of round rubber tires.

A minute of silent contemplation plus some minutes of tabletop brainstorming generate involvement and engagement.

This image, paradoxically pointed out by someone else dissociated from my live presentation using the cartoon, operates as an organizational Inkblot / Rorschach Test. There is no real reality of the illustration, but people project their beliefs onto it. There may be comments about leadership or trust or systems and processes or whathaveyou. (I have actually collected 300 comments about this one illustration!

So, they then brainstorm some of the current issues within their organization -- "What are some Square Wheels?"

And we can allow them to dot-vote on most significant "best" or whatever, using a forced-

browsing technique to aid sharing.

And "What are some Round Wheels" is another related question.

In summary, we allow the GROUP to process the ideas and information and maybe generate some specific ideas for implementation, etc. Lots of ways to apply this to performance.

For COACHING, we now have a really supportive environment and framework to have individual discussions.

An approach is to bring the employee into a conducive setting (an unemotional one, maybe even semi-public) and have a discussion about what YOU might see as something that might be a Square Wheel and then asking them if they might have the same opinion and if they might have any ideas about implementing a round wheel that would address the issue.

There are lots of different ways to accomplish this critical step, once the metaphor has been anchored. The key is to generate their involvement and commitment.

If the flow allows and the individual does not have any ideas, it is certainly acceptable to review some of the group discussion stuff and bring up some of the suggested round wheels from the discussions.

Key questions are around, "What else might you try to do?" and "Will you give that a try and let me know what happens?" and "Can you try to do something like that on the (next transaction)?" or similar.

We can only choose among considered alternatives.

One of the things that brainstorming and group discussion and coaching can

accomplish is to broaden the possible choices among which a person can choose.

So, we use the Square Wheels to generate a natural discomfort with the way things are, use the discussions to clarify goals / missions / visions / expectations and then work on the teaming aspect of getting things done and the peer pressure focused on bringing more of the people into the group alignment.

Our New Team Building Game

Innovate & Implement

We are quite pleased to offer our newest organizational development and training tool to our customers. I&I is a Square Wheels game, using the metaphor of replacing SWs with round ones as the reason for playing.

In the game, players move around a game board with the roll of a die. As players follow different routes, they must enter rooms, uncover and solve a problem related to innovation or implementation, and uncover what might be a round wheel.

On discovering all four round wheels, they must race back to the starting point in order to complete the game. They are working against a timer and have a process to follow for each of their turns. The more efficiently they can work together, the more effective are their movements.

Play also requires collaboration, the sharing of problem solving cards. So, a

level of planning and a smooth process for moving information and resources between the players at each table is a necessity.

The game is designed for a table of 3 to 4 players and each of the tables is an independent game, so the exercise can scale up to very large groups since little on-the-floor facilitation is required for control. Since each table is working against a central clock, the group is all completing the exercise at the same time.

I&I has a strong and robust design and the metaphors built into the game about problems and problem solving are solid.

Players view a PowerPoint slide program that covers the rules and procedures, they have time for questions, and they then play a short trial game to insure that they understand the flow of the process. Then, you start the clock and play begins.

It is bundled with our typical extensive debriefing materials, along with a number of our different bundles of Square Wheels tools.



click on the image to go to the website

We guarantee that you will like how the game plays and that you can readily link the issues and opportunities represented by the transition of Square Wheels into round ones to your organizational improvement or engagement initiatives.

Cartoon Animation:

Godzilla Meets Bambi

Yeah, we went crazy. But I got inspired to show some of my thinking about why innovation and motivation get squished in so many organizations and my colleagues at EduRiser in India put my initial thoughts done in PowerPoint into a short Flash animation.

This is a 2-minute video of some thinking about people and productivity and innovation and leadership and all of those organizational development things. And it ends in a somewhat predictable manner.

Click on the icon below to go to the website and view the animation.



Have some FUN out There!

Performance Management Company



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