

People on Projects

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guest columnist

Your Lucky Number!

Here are 13 tips for enhancing project management with motivation

by John L. Bennett



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Working to accomplish a project on time, on budget, and within scope requires a high degree of motivation. In this article I will explore how to be motivated and inspire others to achieve project goals.

Theories of motivation that can serve to guide managers abound, among them are the classics such as McGregor's Theory X and Y, Ouchi's Theory Z, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory. When one considers motivation we often hear people tell of leaders who have inspired them or life events that have created a significant, perhaps transformational, shift in their lives. I would like to suggest that motivation is internal and inspiration is external.

When confronted with managing a project one is actually faced with leading a team of individuals focused on a common goal. We know that one of the most effective ways to build teamwork is to focus on a common goal with the right people and the right resources. So, you should be well on your way to having a well functioning project, right? Should be, but not necessarily. There is more to consider.

In their book *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001), Buckingham and Clifton explain that approximately 20% of employees working in large organiza-

tions feel their strengths are in play every day. Why is this significant? Buckingham and Clifton also found through their research that when employees responded "strongly agree" to the question "At work do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?" that employee turnover was lower, productivity was higher, and customer satisfaction was higher. Therefore, project managers who identify and utilize project team members' strengths are more likely to enhance the success of projects.

You can inspire people but you cannot motivate them. Inspiration comes from without; motivation comes from within. All you can do is create the environment in which people feel motivated.

I would also suggest that it is important to facilitate situations and environments in which project team members are able to function in what Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow*, 1997) calls "flow." This is when we function at our best, when we lose track of time because we are so involved in an activity, when

upon reflection we realize how we were able to use our skills to achieve something that initially may have seemed difficult or even impossible, when we are satisfied with the work we have done. Flow occurs when there is a high level of challenge coupled with a high level of requisite skills to face the challenge. Without this balance one faces anxiety, relaxation, boredom, or apathy. These latter states are not conducive to high performance and satisfaction.

Your Lucky Thirteen

What can be done to create situations in which team members are motivated to perform well? Here are some suggestions:

1. Have a clearly defined, well-understood, and generally accepted mission.
2. Identify the skills, abilities, experiences, and knowledge required for the project. Consider the needs for both technical and relational aspects in each of these.
3. Conduct an inventory of skills, abilities, experiences, and knowledge among prospective (or assigned) personnel and select team members that provide what is required and comprise a balance across the entire team.

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Remember, too much of a good thing may be bad.

4. Assign team members as human resources to tasks that fully utilize their strengths on a regular basis. In other words, you would never expect a computer to sweep the floor, so do not expect individuals to perform tasks that are not aligned with their strengths.
5. Identify the personal and professional goals and needs of team members and tailor your interactions and their work to meet those objectives. This will require creating a work environment in which managers are comfortable getting to know team members at a more personal level and a work environment in which employees are comfortable sharing with managers. In other words, relationships involving trust and mutual respect must be formed.
6. Provide rewards and recognition to team members in a manner that meets their needs. Often managers make two critical mistakes when recognizing teams members. First, managers want to give the recognition that they themselves would like to receive. Keep in mind the recognition is for the team member, not for the manager. Second, managers recognize everyone in the same manner in order to be fair and equitable. Remember, everyone is different. Not everyone wants the same kind of recognition. Find out how the team members prefer to be recognized and design the recognition to meet their needs. The recognition provided to one team member may be motivating while the same recognition may be de-motivating to another.
7. Provide resources necessary for team members to perform the tasks assigned. If a manager sets a team member up for failure by not provid-

ing the essential resources, the manager is likely to get what he or she deserves. They are likely to which is, contributing to the failure of the task, and as well as to de-motivating a valuable team member.

8. Involve team members in decision-making in meaningful ways. Asking for input, listen to it, and act upon it. If a decision cannot be made in the way team members have suggested, take time to explain why. In his book, *Beyond Games and Scripts* (1976), Berne describes six types of relationships that involve adult, parent, and child roles. In the workplace adult-adult relations are the most healthy and productive. High-performing project teams do not have room for adults acting like children.
9. Be willing to take risks. This will inspire team members to take risks and foster creativity.
10. Be willing to admit mistakes, and do not stop with the admission. Take time to learn from the mistakes so that they are unique. Create and foster an environment of continuous learning and growth.
11. Celebrate team successes. While teams are comprised of individuals, the strength and value of working together deserves to be acknowledged and rewarded. Recognize the team efforts in ways that meet the needs of the team.
12. Remove team members that are not meeting the needs of the project. This may mean that are not able to perform the work that is required and/or are detrimental to the performance of the team. As difficult as it may be to remove a project team member, retaining an unproductive or counter-productive member is more harmful to the success of other team members

Tip # 4:

Don't expect a computer to sweep the floor. Assign tasks that are aligned with team member skills and strengths.

Tip # 10:

Admit your mistakes, but don't stop there. Allow your mistakes to create learning situations for the whole group.

and the project as a whole.

13. Ask the team for input on what is inhibiting their work and what is cultivating their success. Find ways of removing the barriers and supporting more of the behaviors, team members, and resources that contribute to success.

OUR “BAKER’S DOZEN” motivational tips, as you can see, are simply good project management practice. That’s because—lucky for you—project management is a discipline that lends itself well to satisfying the needs of achievement-oriented people. Create the proper environment for project management, and team members will express their intrinsic motivation to succeed ... by succeeding. ♦

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