

Motivation

By Ralph Colby

Billions of words have been written on the subject of motivation, ranging from the rah-rah variety of Monday morning pep talks to some very useful ideas rooted in the best of the behavioral sciences. Managers read these words because they want to get more productivity from their people, and salespeople read them to try and discover the magic key to more sales. So at this late date, what could possibly be said about motivation?

Plenty. Because the question of why people behave as they do – like the question of how people learn – has not yet been completely answered. There are many theories and opinions on why people work, but little hard data. Nor does this article claim to add any. It does claim to offer you an alternative way of looking at the subject of motivation.

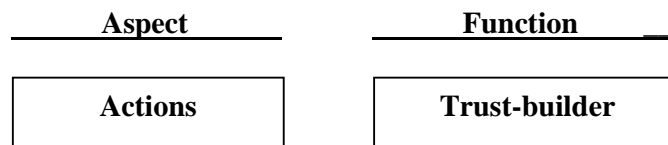
Motivation comes from the root word “to move”. We want to learn better how to influence others to move and to produce. That is, we want action, movement, a certain kind of behavior...because behavior is all that counts; namely, what people actually do.

That’s really all we can know about other people – what they actually do and say, their behavior. In fact, much misunderstanding can take place by making assumptions about things unseen, like trying to guess others’ intentions, integrity and sincerity. We can’t know that!

The important fact is that how a manager behaves will build or diminish trust in every encounter with every other person. We’ve claimed before in these pages that people work for organizations they trust, and we know that trust comes or doesn’t come as a result of the way people act toward one another. Good intentions don’t count. Neither does sincerity. The only thing that counts is whether in your behavior you exhibit the four elements of trust: reliability, openness, acceptance and straightforwardness.

Behavior can be compared to the tip of an iceberg. It’s there for everyone to see. Sure, there’s a lot underneath (and to be successful motivators means that we must take seriously that large part under the water), but how we interact with others in the open, above the surface, determines the kind of response we will get.

Behavior, then, is the first “aspect” of any person. Effective managers use their behavior to function as trust-builders. The first part of motivation, then, is something we do to ourselves, not what we do to others. Expressed graphically, the first step would look like this:



If, however, we expect to get from others the behavior we desire, we cannot pay attention only to their behavior. We must look below the surface of the water to discover what’s causing the visible part of the iceberg to behave as it does. Where, then, does behavior come from?

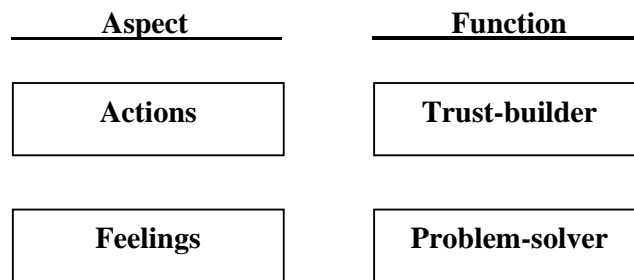
Feelings. Feelings like confidence, anger, enthusiasm, strength, fear, courage, curiosity, guilt, and optimism. It is those feelings that cause us to behave as we do. Generally, people buy something in order to get a good feeling. By way of illustration, think of the feeling you had the very first time

you drove that nice, shiny new car (and the bad feeling you left behind in the used-car yard). Whether people buy popcorn or pills or policies or a Porsche, they are buying a good feeling (comfort, relaxation, health, and excitement) that comes from owning and using a product or service.

The same motivation applies to work. People are productive if they feel good about themselves, their company and their task. If that feeling is present, people will produce, solve problems, and get things done. If bad feelings are present (like anxiety, insecurity, jealousy, and resentment), then people tend to blame, scold, excuse and use other non-productive and energy-sapping devices to keep the heat off them and on others.

We know that people work better if they are interested in the task to be done. What research in behavioral science has shown us is that when people say they are “interested” in something, they mean that it is (1) important and (2) pleasant to them at that time. A gold mine of motivational material and method lays buried in that statement.

The point, however, is that people work when they get good feelings from doing so. The smart manager, then, functions in a way that solves problems with subordinates/colleagues so that those positive feelings may emerge and be acted upon. Our picture takes on a second dimension:



A lot of feelings are going on under the water level, below the tip of the iceberg, but the vast majority of people have had little or no training in identifying, sorting out, and using their feelings to their own and other’s advantage.

There is more to the iceberg. Feelings don’t emerge out of nothing. They seem to derive from our value system; that is, what is important to us and how we order, or priorities, our time, energy and other resources in fulfilling those priorities.

When, for example, a person says to you, “I don’t have the time” for a given project or meeting, you may always translate that into “it is not important enough to me.” We have time to do things we really want to do. We may verbalize (and even believe) that we would really like to be spending our time differently, but if deep down we really wanted to, then we would be doing it.

Again, few of us have had the opportunity really to clarify our values as they express themselves in priorities. If we did, we’d get more done and enjoy doing it more.

This we do know – that when two people are together, their priorities are never exactly the same. Effective managers recognize that fact, and know how to influence their subordinate/colleague to reorder priorities, or to change them. They also know that the natural response to change is resistance, and develop the skills to bring about the change so that it brings co-operative, rather than defensive, behavior.

We have added another dimension to the iceberg and another function to effective managers:

<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Function</u>
Actions	Trust-builder
Feelings	Problem-solver
Values	Change-agent

There is a fourth and final aspect to the person, the most submerged part of the iceberg, where all behavior originates, all motivation begins. Everything we say or do is ultimately designed, consciously or unconsciously, to satisfy one or more of our basic needs. Different theoreticians describe human needs in somewhat different ways (one of my amusements is imagining a discussion on the subject between Drs. Freud, Berne, Rogers and Maslow), but all agree that there is no such thing as random behavior, that all action has a purpose to meet our needs.

Effective people know that they must help satisfy the needs of people they interact with, if their own needs are to be met. Give some to gain some; that's what effective managers do. Satisfying their own needs at the expense of others at one extreme, or submerging their own to indulge others at the opposite extreme are losing strategies. Mutual need satisfaction is a winner.

So our complete picture looks like this:

<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Function</u>
Actions	Trust-builder
Feelings	Problem-solver
Values	Change-agent
Needs	Need-satisfier

Complex? Sure, because people are complex creatures. Motivating others to work is a task for people who are willing to put in the effort to understand why people behave as they do.

This is far from the last word on motivation. Billions of words more will still be written and need to be. But we are ready to show people the process that seems to work better than anything else we know about so far.