

## **Motivating People: Why it doesn't work**

A topic that I'm often asked about is how to motivate people. Managers are always looking for ways to improve the attitude and performance of their people. My clients will tell often me about how they've met and worked with each of their people to get them to improve their performance but can't seem to make a difference.

So, the question is, "How do you motivate people?" The answer is simple. You can't motivate people! It's not that your people are a peculiar breed or that they're an apathetic bunch. The fact is that you can't motivate anyone! Motivation only comes from within. Agents and Reps (in fact, all people) are only self-motivated. People will only do what they choose to do. Don't take my word for it. Use your own experience with people as your best example. People will generally perform only to a level that matters *to them*. No amount of threatening, pleading or rewarding will motivate them into action.

However, there is a way to make a difference. And it's not a theory. I've seen it work on a regular basis. The key to getting people to rise above their present level of performance is to 1) develop a district/agency Purpose, 2) recruit to your Purpose, and then 3) appeal to that Purpose to bring out the best in your agents' performance and drive.

### **1) Develop a Purpose**

Most districts have policies and procedures, guidelines, marketing messages, and statements of mission/vision/etc. mounted on their walls. All of those are well and good, but they don't address the matter which has the greatest impact on their business and their teams. They don't address the topic of Purpose.

In the absence of a clear Purpose - the "WHY" of the organization - people are simply recruited to fill vacancies, policies are developed which are unclear and don't further the attainment of a purpose, systems are lacking, actions are taken which would otherwise be in direct conflict with the Purpose of the organization, and decisions are made inconsistently, without regard to the culture of the organization.

In contrast, a district/agency which has a clear Purpose ("Why"), recruits smarter, has a consistent set of policies that support its Purpose, has a yardstick to measure its decisions against, has an easier time attracting and retaining the right people, and has the means to develop and deliver a clear marketing message.

Purpose defines why we do what we do. It defines why we go to work each day. Without purpose, people just go through the motions and as most of us know, there's a great difference between activity and achievement. Having a clear purpose creates a yardstick, so to speak, to measure our decisions against. It helps us become passionate, helps us to select among the many options presented to us, helps us make better recruiting decisions, and keeps us on track. It's possible to succeed without a clear purpose, but having one speeds and magnifies the results.

When a district/agency has a clearly defined purpose it begins to act as a magnet, attracting the kind of people who will further that purpose; people who are like-minded. Not only will having a purpose attract the right people, but it will also act to retain them. This is the power behind the success of many not-for-profit organizations. Although they often are unable to pay their staff great sums of money, they continue to attract and retain people who are dedicated and who work hard to achieve the purpose of the organization. While your district/agency's purpose may not be as altruistic as a not-for-profit's purpose, it definitely plays an important, almost critical, role.

How you develop a meaningful purpose? Ask yourself why you initially got into this business. Was it all about the money? (Some people get in because of that, but because you've advanced to the role you now have, that's not likely to be the case for you.) What was it? If nothing immediately comes to mind for you, it might be a good time to take a step back from your everyday work to reflect on why *you* do what you do? When you're clear about what you're about - what you stand for - then you'll begin attracting the right kind of prospective agents or reps. Additionally, you'll have the ability to appeal to the many ways people are self-motivated.

## **2) Recruit to your Purpose**

When we try to motivate someone who doesn't either have a purpose or share ours, it either doesn't work or at best simply gets them to go through the motions. The key therefore, is getting the right people on board in the first place; people who are self-motivated. What's the best way to achieve this goal? Recruit to a Purpose. By recruiting to your Purpose, you attract candidates who believe in what you believe in. They join you not only to make a great living, but to accomplish something more - something meaningful. They decide to make a living by helping people in some way. Conversely, people that come on board without some driving purpose will work just to get the job done and no more. They tend to lack the self-motivation you want. Work on developing a way to screen candidates to best determine whether they are aligned to your district/agency's purpose. Once you're clear on your overriding Purpose, this process becomes fairly apparent.

## **3) Appeal to your Purpose**

Once you have a clear Purpose developed, over-communicate it! Starting with your new-agent orientation, drive the message home. Make sure you live and breathe your Purpose. Don't make the message trite by putting up posters around the office; instead speak it (sincerely) at every opportunity. Make certain your performance reviews take into account how well the person lived up to the Purpose. Ask yourself whether each business decision, system and policy will take you and your people closer to or further from your Purpose.

When a district/agency has clearly defined its Purpose, then all decisions, policies, and actions will have a means to keep them on course and you will have an organization which attracts and keeps the best!

***Author Information:***

Michael J. Beck, President  
Exceptional Leadership, Inc.  
877-977-8956  
[mbeck@XLeaders.com](mailto:mbeck@XLeaders.com)  
[www.XLeaders.com](http://www.XLeaders.com)

Michael Beck is President of Exceptional Leadership, Inc., a leadership development and executive coaching firm dedicated to creating effective leadership for higher profits and greater job satisfaction.

His background enables him to help clients develop their leadership abilities, broaden their strategic thinking, adopt new perspectives, and create a stronger executive presence. His industry expertise includes insurance, restaurant, franchising, international, legal, and construction.

Mr. Beck's credentials include an MBA in Finance from the Wharton School of Business along with degrees in Engineering from the University of Pennsylvania. In the past, Michael has held a variety of executive positions and worked several years overseas as a Business Advisor to a member of the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia.

