



ADVICE FOR MANAGERS



Questions to Lead By: Let Your Employees Tell You How to Motivate Them

[By Keith Rosen, MCC]

Motivating employees is often exhausting and time-consuming work. Managers provide incentives, set goals, acknowledge top producers, even use consequences or threats. They use these tactics in an attempt to stimulate some level of interest in their staff, trying to push them into action.

Yet, when that external stimulation is no longer present, people have a tendency to slip back into their old ways, not moving unless someone is there to push.

Although worn out from this exercise, business owners tell me they believe their primary role is “problem solver” to their employees’ challenges — a role probably learned from their predecessors and mentors. Many attempt to control their environments, working within the limits of what they already have. Some spend their time extinguishing fires. Others derive their energy from keeping certain challenges alive, providing themselves with some sense of purpose.

Perhaps the real issue is failing to tap into what might drive employees to motivate themselves.

Seth Hallen, owner of Home Security Inc., discovered this. His 25-person staff had a tendency to deviate from company procedures that continually resulted in production delays. Deciding it was because they were unclear about their responsibilities, Hallen had his staff write up their own job descriptions and career goals.

The results were surprising. Telemarketers wanted flextime and opportunities for

career growth. Salespeople cared more about job stability and receiving positive acknowledgments for good performance rather than commissions. In response, Hallen adjusted the job descriptions and procedures, creating individualized incentive programs geared to each employee’s goals and strengths. He empowered his staff by seeing and acknowledging their natural abilities, while supporting their personal visions of what was important to them.

Hallen found this simple exercise made a dramatic difference in how his staff approach their careers. “There’s less friction or communication breakdowns. People are taking ownership of their responsibilities, providing a greater sense of accountability and direction,” Hallen says. “I also find they are much more responsive to changes in our company that support the corporate vision we can all be pulled towards, rather than pushed to achieve.”

Continually providing employees with solutions can train employees not to be accountable. It will likely result in the lackluster performance you are working so diligently to avoid. It creates an environment of dependency, preventing employees from sharpening problem-solving skills or discovering their own solutions.

Today’s enlightened leaders are instead coaching, more than managing, their staffs. The difference is that you give strength or inspiration by uncovering what internally motivates them based on their beliefs and values, as opposed to stimulating interest externally based on your beliefs. Tapping into a person’s previously unused talents advances personal growth, challenging people to discover their best.

Coaching utilizes a process of inquiry which allows your staff to articulate what they want and then access their own energy to achieve it. Otherwise, you’re using your energy to get someone else in motion. To uncover each person’s internal drive, ask questions. Invest the time uncovering what is truly important to your staff in order to improve performance and align their efforts with the company’s vision and direction.

Here are some suggested questions:

- What do you want in your career that you don’t currently have?
- What do you want to be doing that you aren’t currently doing?
- What are you doing now that you don’t want to be doing?



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- What areas do you want to strengthen, improve, or develop?
 - What is most important to you in your life/career? (What does a successful career/life look like?)
 - What is the legacy you want to leave behind when you are gone?
 - What are the three most important things you would like to accomplish right now?
 - What is your action plan to achieve those goals?
- What do you need that's missing which is preventing you from reaching those goals?
 - How can I best support you to achieve these goals? (Uncover how each employee wants to be managed/supported.)

Invest the time asking your staff questions, listening for their responses, and asking more questions as you uncover what they most want. Sure, you need the right answers to stay in business. However, to get ahead, you need the right questions. Allow questions to become the cornerstone for effortless leadership that generates long-term results.

About the Author

Keith Rosen is The Executive Sales Coach and best-selling author of several books including *Time Management for Sales Professionals* and *Coaching Salespeople Into Sales Champions. Inc.* and *Fast Company* named Keith one of the five most influential executive coaches. Contact www.ProfitBuilders.com or info@profitbuilders.com.

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