Motivation: The Fire Within

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Motivation is a word of wonder. Many people claim it. Few understand it.

Denis Waitley understands it. So does Martin Covington. Waitley says motivation is “an inner force that causes behavior.” Covington calls it “an internal state that impels individuals toward action.”

Both understand that motivation begins from the inside out; not the other way around. Both understand that motivation is the fire within.

And if the fire comes from within, only the person in whom it burns can light it! No pressure from a friend, a parent, a spouse, or a manager is motivation. Pressure is external. Motivation is internal. Motivation is not something that someone gives or does to someone else.

Does that surprise you? Did you think you could motivate other people? I know I did. If you did, you were wrong. So was I. But we were not alone.

There is a myth about motivation that has been going around for years. It says that people can motivate other people. That myth is popular, but it’s not true. People motivate themselves. Their fire comes from within.

So the bad news is, you cannot motivate anyone else. But the good news is you don’t have to. All people have a fire within. All people are motivated. They all work hard at something. That includes health-care workers. All of them work hard at something.

Some of them work hard at health care; like you do. Others work hard at asking for a raise, finding ways to leave early, or having weekends off. Still others work hard at bringing up a family, getting through graduate school, breaking 100 in golf, or keeping their grass green. But they all work hard at something!

There are even some health care workers who work hard at not working hard! I had a friend in graduate school like that. He conducted a nationwide computer search trying to find a research paper on a certain topic so he could copy the paper and submit it for 1 of his courses. The search took him 2 months and cost $300 dollars. It would have been faster and cheaper to write the paper himself. But my friend was too busy. He was busy working hard at not working hard.

It’s true. Everyone works hard at something. The people you work with are no different. They work hard at something. But as a manager, you must get those people to work hard at the right thing. You must get your staff to work hard at what you want them to. You must point their fire in your direction. So let’s talk about direction.

A person’s fire is like steam coming out of a teapot. That steam is wasted because it has no direction. But if that steam is directed, it can become powerful enough to drive a locomotive or make electricity. The fire that burns within every person is more powerful than any locomotive. It shines brighter than all the world’s electricity. But that fire needs direction. That fire needs goals. And those goals must be SMART.

They must be:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Timed

If people don’t know where they are going, they might never get there. The purpose of a goal is not to define success or failure, but direction. Thus, good goals must be Specific and Measurable. You must know if you reach them and if you don’t.

A high school track coach told his runners to “work hard” and “run fast.” His runners never knew if they got there or if they didn’t. Neither did the coach. Bad goals. Another coach told her runners to “run 5 quarter miles in under a minute.” Then “run 5 more faster than that.” Her runners never knew if they got there, and if they didn’t. Good goals. They were specific. They were measurable.

Goals must also be Attainable. Progress is the root of all achievement. People will not progress towards a goal they feel cannot be reached. Still, almost all goals can be reached. Something is impossible only until it is accomplished. So reach for the moon. If you fail, you may touch a star.

Next, the goals of a group must relate to the needs of its members. They must be important to its members. People care about what they own. So members must own their goals. They must set their goals.

Freud said, “The rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which the horse wants to go.” Listen to Freud. All excellence is built on commitment. People will always commit to what they own.

So, let your staff set their goals. Let them own their goals.

First, “a goal is a dream with a deadline,” so every goal must be Timed.

Professor Parkinson was right, tasks take the time they are allotted to be completed. So, allot a specific amount of time to each goal.

While you are being so SMART, remember that goals are like children. Too many will drive you crazy! No individual or organization can achieve excellence in more than 3 things at the same time. When it comes to goals, less is more. Three is plenty. Two is better. One is best. When you reach 1, add another. Until then, don’t go crazy.

So far, so good. People have a fire within. Managers should give that fire direction. They should give it SMART goals. But people don’t have to follow that direction. They don’t have to work toward those goals.

In every laboratory, hospital, and office, people have the right to choose. People can do what they want.

They can look busy without being busy. They can over promise and under deliver. They can come late, leave early, or stay home. They can act up or act out. The people you work with can choose their own direction and they do!

So as a manager, supervisor, and leader, what can you do? You can give those people direction, and then you can get people to choose your direction. You can get people to want to do what you want them to. Sounds great, but how can you do that? How can you get people to choose your direction? How can you get people to want to do what you want them to?

By sending your staff 3 messages. What messages? These messages:
- “YOU ARE IMPORTANT,”
- “YOU CAN DO IT,”
- and “FOLLOW ME.”
Sending those 3 messages is your best chance of getting people to point their fires in your direction. Sending those 3 messages is your best chance of getting people to want to do what you want them to. Let’s talk about these messages 1 at a time.

“You Are Important.”

Say “You are important” to the people you work with as often as you can, as loudly as you can, in as many ways as you can. Do all you can to make the people you work with feel important. Why? First, because they are! Thomas Edison once said, “You can burn my buildings and close my plants. If you leave me my people, I will rebuild and flourish. But if you take my people, no matter what else you leave me, I have nothing.” Edison was right. If you are a manager, supervisor, or leader—or all 3—people are your most important resource. Your job has no value without them. So, for starters, make people feel important because they are! Why else should you make people feel important? Because making people feel important is the best way you have of getting them to point their fire in your direction. If you want people to choose your direction, “you are important” is the most important message you can send!

People hunger to be noticed, to be valued, to feel important. Is there anything else? If all else fails, use force. Be a better manager than that man was a captain. Listen to the captain of the unsinkable Titanic before it struck the iceberg that sank it. The captain of the Titanic was not a good listener. He heard all of the warnings but listened to none of them. Be a better manager than that man was a captain. Listen to the people you work with. Make them feel important!

And HOW can you make the people you work with feel important? The first and best thing you can do to make people feel important is to believe they are important just by being themselves. If you believe that, it will show. If you don’t, that will show, too. Convince yourself once and for all that the people you work with are important, truly important, unconditionally important. The rest will take care of itself.

People can see right through you. They have built-in “bull” meters. You can’t fool people for long about anything. The only way to be sure you are making people feel important is to BELIEVE they are important.

Another way to make people feel important is to LISTEN to them! Pay attention when they talk. We are flattered by other people’s attention. It makes us feel special. It makes us feel important. That is 1 of the basic facts of human psychology. So ask people how they feel or what they think and listen when they answer!

On the night the Titanic sank, it received 5 clear warnings of icebergs from other ships. All 5 of those warnings were given to the captain of the unsinkable Titanic before it struck the iceberg that sank it. The captain of the Titanic was not a good listener. He heard all of the warnings but listened to none of them. Be a better manager than that man was a captain. Listen to the people you work with. Make them feel important!

Giving people RESPONSIBILITY makes them feel important, too. When I was in the fifth grade, my teacher put me on the safety patrol. I got a white belt and a badge. My post was on a street that wasn’t even paved. I mean no cars ever used that street. I made myself feel important. The only way to be sure you are making people feel important is to BELIEVE they are important.

Another way to make people feel important is to LISTEN to them. LISTEN to them. LISTEN to them. LISTEN to them.

BELIEVE they are important.

LISTEN to them.

Give them RESPONSIBILITY.

PRaise them.

So much for your first (and longest!) message. What is the second one?

“You Can Do It.”

A visitor to one of Henry Ford’s auto plants met Ford after a tour of the factory. The visitor was in awe of what he had seen. “It seems impossible,” the visitor told Ford, “that a man who started with nothing could accomplish all this.”

“You say that I started with nothing,” Ford replied, “but I am wrong. I started with all I needed to do anything. So does everyone.” You have all you need. So do the people you work with. Believe that. Believe Henry Ford.

As a leader, after you deal in DIRECTION and IMPORTANCE, you must deal in FAITH—faith in yourself and faith in the people you work with. Let’s talk about faith in yourself first. No matter how well you think you can do in leadership or in life, you can do better. Believe that. Believe in yourself. Have faith in yourself.

A kindergarten class was having an art lesson 1 day. Their teacher asked 1 little girl what she was drawing. “I’m drawing a picture of God,” the child replied. “But sweetheart,” said the teacher, “no one knows what God looks like.” “They will in a minute!” said the little girl. Think like that little girl. Have a childlike faith in yourself; no matter what challenges or odds you face.

Do you want to have the most significant educational experience of your life? Try this:

Step 1—Find something you cannot do.

Step 2—Do it.

That experience will teach you the most important thing there is to know about the world’s most important subject. That most important subject is you. And the most important thing there is to know about you is that you can do much more than you think you can. Believe that. Believe in yourself. Have faith in yourself.

Have faith in the people you work with, too. Every one of those people has been given great gifts. Some of them just need help taking off the wrapping!

So send a message to your staff that says, “You can do PTs,” and “you can do PTTs,” and “you can troubleshoot the DAX,” and “you can identify that nonfermenter!” Send a message to the people you work with that says, “you can do more than you think you can!” Have faith in the people you work with.
Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, was told not to write by her family. They told her that girls had no business writing; and that Louisa should become a servant or seamstress instead.

When he was 14-years old, a boy’s teacher and classmates voted him “the student least likely to do anything with his life!” That boy’s name was Napoleon Bonaparte.

Alex Haley received at least 1 rejection letter a week for 4 years before *Roots* was finally published.

Albert Einstein did not speak until he was 4 years old. His grade school teacher described him as “mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in his own foolish dreams.”

In 1962, an executive for Decca Records heard a new singing group perform. “They don’t have enough talent to make it,” said the executive. “Besides, guitar groups are on their way out.” Guess who he was talking about. He was talking about the Beatles.

Don’t be like Louisa Mae Alcott’s family, Albert Einstein’s teacher, or that executive for Decca Records.

“YOU CAN DO IT.” Tell that to your staff. Tell that to yourself.

Great. We have talked about the first 2 messages. Now let’s go for number 3.

“Follow Me.”

If you want people to point their fire in your direction, you must lead the way. You must point yourself in that direction first. If you want to lead, you must lead by example. You must lead by action because actions speak louder than words.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “What you do speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you say.” Emerson was right. Actions speak louder than words.

If a member of your family died next week and I called or wrote to say I was sorry, would you believe me? Probably. But if I came to the funeral, no matter how far away it was, would you believe me more? I think so. Why? Because actions speak louder than words.

Actions speak louder than anything. So if you want people to care, you must care first. And if you want people to give, you must give first. And if you want people to quit, you must quit first. What if you don’t want people to quit? When should you quit? Never! That’s right. If you don’t want the people you work with to give up, don’t you give up. Failure is not falling down, it is staying down. So don’t give up!

“Never give in. Never give in. Never give in. In all things large or small, great or petty, never, never, never, give in.” Winston Churchill said that to the people of Great Britain in the darkest days of World War II. Churchill knew what he was talking about. It took him 3 years to get through the sixth grade because he had trouble learning English. But he never gave in. And Churchill was not alone.

Michelangelo spent 4 years lying on his back on a scaffold painting the Sistine Chapel. By the time he finished, he was virtually blind from the paint that had dripped into his eyes. But he never gave in.

Dr. Seuss’ first children’s book was rejected by 23 publishers, but he never gave in.

Then there was the little girl from Tennessee who was born to face poverty, obesity, a broken home, and physical abuse. Today she is a multimillionaire and one of the most recognizable celebrities in the world. Guess who. That’s right. She is Oprah. Oprah never gave in.


Never, never, never give in.

Life and leadership are full of problems. But you are bigger than them all. Those problems are nothing but speed bumps on your road to success!

All you need to succeed is belief in yourself and a big pot of glue. Smear some on you and some on your dreams. Then stick to that dream until it is done!

Speaking of done, that is what I am! But before I go, tell me, what is motivation?

A fire within. And how many people are motivated? All of them. How many people can you motivate? None. What can you do instead? You can give people direction. And how can you get people to choose your direction? By sending 3 messages. And what are they?

“YOU ARE IMPORTANT,”

“YOU CAN DO IT,”

and “FOLLOW ME.”

Have you got that? All of it? Good! Now don’t forget! And keep that fire burning!