

# Who Motivates the Motivator?

© Tom Northup September 2009

We are experiencing the most dramatic business climate changes since the 1930's. We are in a 100-year flood economically and will not quickly return to the comfort and growth of the 1980s and 90s. For many companies, it will take years to return to 2007 revenue levels. For all companies and industries, Washington is changing the way we do business in such diverse areas as health care, union relationships and capital access.

Many companies are downsizing, cost cutting and reducing expectations. Employees are experiencing loss of income. Personal angst is high. Great uncertainty affects everyone's lives.

In this environment productivity and creativity suffer. It becomes very difficult to change uncertainty and pessimistic attitudes to optimism. We must re-energize our employees so they will work together to achieve the vision of the organization. The conundrum is that we need time to create effective change yet we need employee commitment for this to occur. Employee motivation is one of our most important tasks.

The obvious question is: Who motivates the Motivator? His or her career and financial status are all affected in a major way. The 80s and 90s were good. Managers achieved high levels of organizational and financial success. Organizational growth brought great personal reward. Yet success often breeds comfort. When success is easy we lose some of our passion and drive.

Change affects the leader in a major way. The "the new normal" environment means change is not temporary but long term. Leaders also experience doubt, procrastination and loss of purpose. How do you recommit yourself and build the infectious personal enthusiasm necessary to motivate yourself and others? Who provides your drive?

The answer is: You must motivate yourself. No one else will. True motivation is internal. We can't change reality. We can only react.

Business conditions are unforgiving. We don't have time. Change is pervasive and might swamp us. We must rapidly build a program of personal motivation if we are to keep up.

A positive mental attitude is a key attribute of successful people. If you are struggling with negative emotions, you need to recommit to building a burning desire to reach new goals. List the benefits of reaching these goals or list the alternatives, the losses you may incur if you don't reach them. Include all aspects of your life, including family, friends, associates and employees.

Create a strong personal determination to overcome any obstacle that will arise as you work to achieve the benefits of reaching your goal. Develop the attitude that nothing will stand in your way.

Once you realize that your motivation comes from within, you can build a comprehensive plan to create the personal motivation that will help you achieve the success you want. An effective plan has four steps.

- First: Determine the goals you will commit to achieving. Include personal, financial and organizational goals as appropriate. Write them down because writing crystallizes your thoughts and commits you to action. Be specific, including exact dates for completion. Determine how you will measure progress to keep yourself accountable.

- Second: For each goal, develop the action steps you must take to make the goal reality. The smaller the action steps the easier it is to accomplish them. Sequence them. Determine dates for their completion. Decide when you will review progress and what resources and people you need to accomplish them.
- Third: The key to success is to put the action steps into your scheduling system. Make an appointment with yourself to accomplish these steps. They are tremendously important to building your positive mental attitude and achieving the success you envision.
- Fourth: Hold yourself accountable. Regularly review your progress. That way if you miss a step you only have to make a small correction. If your reviews are infrequent, you have a large gap to close when you miss steps. You will mentally slip further behind on your schedule if you are already far behind.

Success is cumulative. Success begins when we accomplish the first step of our plan, not just when we achieve the goal. As we complete each action step milestone, we generate success. Then success breeds more success and momentum increases.

Today we may be starting from a personal situation that includes doubt, procrastination and loss of purpose. These attitudes make it easy to slip behind on our plan. In addition, goals that stretch us expose us to potential failure. In the early stages of achievement, we have difficulty maintaining drive and determination because procrastination and doubt are still strong. The most powerful way to conquer this is to build successful accountability by using others to help us through the process. Accountability is the most difficult step to maintain over time.

In your business, build consensus among the management team to create agreement on which actions the company requires to effect positive change. Develop best thinking where everyone participates in determining which changes are needed and in setting the new direction of the firm. By involving others, you ensure their intellectual and emotional commitment to the change initiatives. They become change proponents not change detractors. Build accountability into the team process to ensure that accountability is group centered, not individually centered. This way everyone supports each other and works together to implement change initiatives.

Personally, don't behave like the Lone Ranger. Use a board of advisors, a mentor or other trusted person to listen to, suggest changes in and challenge your assumptions and your attitudes. Allow them to hold you accountable for the results you commit to. These advisors help you maintain your desire and determination.

True motivation is personal and internal. We motivate ourselves. As leaders, we are responsible for inspiring our employees to develop their own positive motivation. Because you are the role model, your demeanor is critical to the culture of your organization. Become excited about going to work every day and making a difference. This positive attitude will infect your employees. Positive employees and a results oriented organization are important to overcoming your current obstacles and will become a catalyst for your future success.

How do we do this under difficult circumstances? Believe that even though things are tough you still have the ability to control your destiny. Build your burning desire and positive determination to succeed whatever the situation. Fate is in your hands. It is not dictated by others.