

What Floats Your Boat? **Understanding Motivation**

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A story has it that when asked “*How do you motivate astronauts?*” a representative of NASA responded, “We don’t motivate them, but boy, are we careful about whom we select.” [Meredith, Mantel, 2009].

Understanding what motivates people is essential when assembling a project team, be it for a paid position as well as for the unpaid volunteer role. This article will review common motivation techniques, and, address how to motivate under both scenarios – paid-work roles and the uncompensated volunteer.

Common Motivation Techniques

There are several common types of motivation, including Recognition, Achievement, Status and Affiliation. A brief review of each technique is as follows:

- Recognition - Individuals are motivated by *recognition* enjoy attention for their contributions to the group.
- Achievement - Individuals motivated by *achievement* desire to accomplish tasks, projects, or large goals.
- Status - Individuals motivated by *status* strive to reach a position of influence in a group, organization, or situation.
- Affiliation - Individuals motivated by *affiliation* enjoy being part of a group larger than themselves.

Nota bene [as in “note well”]. *Financial Reward* is intentionally not listed. Money is considered not to be a *motivator* but a *satisfier*. People wish to be compensated fairly, on a par with their peers for similar performance. Unfair compensation is a sign of not properly recognizing the contributions of a team member or employee and spells trouble. (This is a good topic for a future discussion / article.)

How to Motivate

The Project Manager can motivate their team members by a) creating a sense of belonging, b) assigning reasonable tasks, c) maintaining transparency, and d) rewarding desirable behavior. A short discussion on each motivation process is offered.

Create a sense of belonging. Even if affiliation is not an individual's main motivating factor, it helps to provide team members with a sense of belonging. Humans generally want to be part of something larger than themselves. To develop a sense of community, the project manager may choose to create an identity for their team by working together to develop a team name. Giving team members an identity as a group engenders commitment.

To encourage a strong rapport between members, the project manager must involve teammates in the decision-making processes of the larger group. If that is not possible, the project manager must be available for comments and invite suggestions.

Assign reasonable tasks. People who volunteer for a team are looking to participate. The project manager needs to be sure to delegate tasks to every member of the group. They need to ensure that tasks match an individual's skill and experience levels and are realistic to accomplish in a reasonable amount of time. Demonstrating an awareness of team member workloads and accomplishments builds trust and gives the project manager the best opportunity to hold team members accountable for completing tasks.

The project manager needs to avoid assigning tasks that are too easy or tedious. Team members are more likely to remain engaged when they are challenged.

Maintain transparency. Maintaining transparency with their team is fundamental to quality leadership by the project manager. The PM must communicate with their team on a regular basis and keep them informed on project status, the on-going results of their efforts, and ways they can contribute.

The project manager must regularly give constructive feedback to everyone regarding their contributions.

Reward desirable behavior. Depending on the personalities and needs of their team members, the project manager should reward them with public or private recognition. Some people prefer to receive praise in front of their peers, while others prefer to hear positive comments about their performance one-on-one.

In some cases, the project manager may want to consider giving a tangible reward. A thank you note shows appreciation for someone's efforts. If the project is part of an organization such as a business, the project manager may consider offering a monetary bonus to high performers. Trophies, ribbons, and certificates are other ways to recognize the contributions of others.

Accepting feedback. Encouraging feedback and accepting it when it is given is fundamental to successfully motivating others. Accepting feedback is an important skill for building positive relationships and interpersonal communication.

The project manager may choose to have others complete a 360° evaluation of their performance. The value of a 360° evaluation is in receiving feedback from people with different perspectives on one's communication and leadership.

A peer PM may have a different experience working with the project manager than a team member they lead. An interested project stakeholder, outside of the team, who oversaw the outcome of the project is another evaluator to consider. Each perspective will give the project manager a different insight into what the PM does well and what skills they can develop.

In conclusion, the project manager's understanding of their team member's individual motivation will keep the project ship afloat and on course to success.

What floats your boat? Your comments are welcome.

Best regards,

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