



The Flow of *Motivation*

The speaker walked back and forth on the stage, never missing a step or a beat in delivering her message. Her delivery was further enhanced by her energy, which in turn sparked the audience's engagement. Heads were nodding, faces smiling, suggesting that she had indeed emotionally connected with her audience and that they were flowing with her until the very end. Once she had concluded, she received a standing ovation.

Leaving the stage, she remembered feeling the flow of her motivation and how each new word had seemed to push that flow faster and faster. Everything had worked together. She was, as they say, "in the zone."

How many times do we—as business executives—experience that flow of motivation, that state of being "in the zone"? Imagine what would happen to any organization if just 50 percent of its employees all experienced the flow at the same time and went in exactly the same direction!

But employee-productivity research figures compiled by Gallup suggest that only 25 percent of employees give eight hours of work for eight hours of pay, while 75 percent of employees give six hours of work or less for eight hours of pay. Clearly there are some weak currents in the flow of motivation.

Having worked with a variety of organizations (ranging in size from firms making over \$1 billion in annual revenue to small-business owners to solo entrepreneurs) in a plethora of industries, I find that four major currents affect the flow of motivation: purpose, dreams, emotional intelligence, and self-directed goals.

Purpose

In the book *The On-Purpose Person*, author Kevin McCarthy likens being on purpose to having the light switch in the "on" position and being off purpose to having the switch in the "off" position. Daniel Pink, in his book *Drive*, asserts that purpose

is the third leg of Type I motivation (the other two legs are autonomy and mastery).

For me, purpose is the answer to this question:

**Why am I here right now,
in this place?**

Purpose is not fixed. As individuals grow and change, so does purpose. A baby's purpose is to eat, sleep, and make messy diapers—basically, to grow. As the baby develops into a toddler, his or her purpose changes into one of exploration, punctuated by that all-too-familiar question, "Why?"

Everyone's purpose evolves over time: finding a career, having a family, enjoying retirement, welcoming grandchildren.

Within purpose lie one's gifts or strengths. These gifts—for example, creativity, thoughtfulness, risk taking, courage, reflection, and resiliency—are positive core values that can be leveraged to achieve one's purpose.

Dreams

Louis Armstrong said, “Goals are dreams with endings.” So many adults fail to invest the time needed to capture the dreams of their youth and write them down—to create their own “bucket list,” in other words. Dreams provide part of the energy that fuels the flow of motivation.

One fieldwork exercise (i.e., homework) that I suggest for my clients is that they list at least three dreams a week, so that after four months they have a list of about 50 dreams. Many of my clients are fearful about writing them down, because they believe doing so will obligate them to achieve them. Not necessarily! Writing down our dreams opens up creativity, freeing the flow of motivation. Not writing them down dams the river and obstructs the flow, reducing its energy.

Emotional Intelligence

The change in business propelled by social media has also catapulted emotional intelligence to the fore. Back in the mid-1960s, Howard Gardner identified multiple intelligences, including the following two types:

Intrapersonal intelligence – How well do I know myself and my emotions?

Interpersonal intelligence – How well do I know others and their emotions?

Daniel Goleman fused these two intelligences into the term “emotional intelligence” and defined it as follows: “the measure of your ability to sense, understand, and effectively apply the power and acumen of your emotions and the emotions of others in order to facilitate high levels of collaboration and productivity” (*Working with Emotional Intelligence*).

Without collaboration (working together in teams) and productivity (the measured result of working together), businesses would not survive. After all, human beings are emotional creatures first; logic (i.e., higher-order cognitive skills) only kicks in if the amygdala opens the gate to allow the new information to pass through.

Self-directed Goals

For the last half century, educators have spoken about the importance of

being a lifelong learner. They are half right. Human beings have an innate desire to learn; otherwise, we would still be living in caves. Just being a lifelong learner, however, ignores the purpose current. What is required (and has always been required) is being a self-directed learner—in other words, learning what is important to you as an individual and to your purpose so that you can fulfill your dreams.

More than 50 years ago, Zig Ziglar created the SMART goal criteria:

- ⑤ Specific
- ⑤ Measurable
- ⑤ Attainable
- ⑤ Realistically set high
- ⑤ Time-driven, target date

However, many people who know about these criteria still are unable consistently to achieve their goals, to turn their dreams into reality.

The reason is because the goals are not WAY SMART:

- ⑤ Written
- ⑤ Aligned to your purpose, passion, and plans
- ⑤ Yours
- ⑤ Specific
- ⑤ Measurable
- ⑤ Attainable
- ⑤ Realistically set high
- ⑤ Time-driven, target date

Failing to write your goals down, to align them with your values and plans, and to truly own them obstructs the flow of motivation. Think back to when you were a teenager and your parents set goals for you, such as “get an A.” Did those goals truly motivate you in a positive sense, or was the motivation basically negative? Negative, extrinsic motivation may create some

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change, but it is not sustainable.

What would happen if, instead of setting your employees' sales goals or other goals, you asked the following question:

What can you do to move this organization closer to (fill in the goal)?

Would the conversation be different? Would you discover some previously unknown obstacles blocking the flow of motivation?

The above question supports intrinsic motivation—motivation that

comes from within. Intrinsic motivation is far more sustainable than the typical extrinsic (outwardly sourced) motivation that results when management sets sales goals or quotas.

My 30-plus years of experience and observation have shown me that inability to increase sales is usually not the problem; rather, it is a symptom of the true problem: leadership failure. For it is the responsibility of the leadership to ensure that strategies, structure, processes, rewards, and people are all in alignment,

reinforcing the desired results.

When Shipping fights with Inbound Sales Orders, you have an internal organizational problem. Or how about when invoices are not paid and vendors are asking for their money? Again, this is not a sales problem but a leadership one. Yet sales people are asked to increase sales even when dysfunction within the organization has not been corrected.

Motivation is the accumulated effect of these four currents—purpose, dreams, emotional intelligence, and self-directed goals. Unfortunately, businesses today too often ignore scientific research when it comes to motivation. Many business leaders, from small-business owners to C Suite executives, believe in the carrot-and-stick approach to motivation. This archaic structure does not work with the flow of motivation. Instead, it actually redirects motivation away from the desired objective. As a result, highly productive employees leave the firm, resulting in yet lower productivity. Then the executive leadership seeks a quick fix because they will not face the real problem.

So instead of asking employees to check their attitudes at the door, maybe now is the time to check the flow of motivation in your organization—provided you have the courage to face the truth and employ sustainable solutions. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith, executive consultant, corporate coach, and author, helps innovative leaders at all levels and in all industries to dramatically improve their teams' results. What this looks like, and why, differs for each firm; therefore Leanne offers a free strategy session to those who forward a request to leanne@processspecialist.com.