

## **Employee Motivation – Driven By How Important Their Work Output is to Others**

When it comes to encouraging employees to be productive workers, managers seemingly have many tools in their motivational toolbox at their disposal.

For example, perhaps they can increase worker motivation by offering to pay more to workers who are especially productive. Or maybe they can try to enhance overall employee morale by including them in a profit-sharing program. Or perhaps they could try to provide recognition to the best workers by offering rewards such as toasters, iPhones, and vacations.

Although all of these tactics have the potential to be effective, they can be extremely costly to implement. However, some new research suggests a recipe for success without spending a dime, all in five easy minutes.

Adam Grant, a scholar in the field of organizational behavior, realized that workers often fail to live up to their potential because they've lost track of the significance and meaningfulness of their own jobs. He figured that if he could remind employees of why their jobs are important, they might become more highly motivated, and therefore, more productive individuals.

To test this idea, he worked with a fundraising organization that allowed him to go to its call centre and randomly assign employees into certain groups. Some of these employees read stories from other employees describing what they perceived were the personal benefits of the job, including financial benefits and the development of skills and knowledge (Personal Benefit condition).

However, another set of employees read stories from the beneficiaries of the fundraising organization, who described how the scholarships they obtained from the organization had a positive impact on their lives (Task Significance condition).

Finally, there was third group of employees that did not read any stories (Control condition). In addition, the employees were told not to talk about or share what they had read with any other callers. The researcher was able to obtain the number of pledges earned as well as the amount of donation money obtained by the callers both one week prior to the study and one month afterward.

What they found was amazing. Employees in the Personal Benefit and Control conditions looked almost exactly the same after the intervention as before it in terms of amount of donation money raised and the number of pledges earned. Yet, those in the Task Significance condition earned more than twice the number of weekly pledges (from an average of 9 to an average of 23) and more than twice the amount of weekly donation money (from an average of \$1,288 to an average of \$3,130).

Additional analyses suggest that the huge increase was driven by previously unmotivated employees increasing the number of calls they made per hour. Of course, not every manager is lucky enough to be in an organization that really does touch lives in such an obvious way. But there's significance and meaningfulness inherent to every job in existence—it's just that employees often lose sight of what that is.

The persuasive leader is someone who can help employees regain their sight by reminding them of how meaningful their jobs can be to others and to themselves.

**By Noah Goldstein, Ph.D.**

**Source:**

Grant, A. M. (2008). The significance of task significance: Job performance effects, relational mechanisms, and boundary conditions. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 108-124.