

# Creative Methods for a Leader to Motivate Others

By Virginia Reeves

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## CREATIVE METHODS FOR A LEADER TO MOTIVATE OTHERS

(1) Let's first take a look at some of the more established and practical ideas that can be used.

A good motivational tool is to establish regular times to acknowledge efforts and provide recognition awards or rewards. These can be simple forms in a cardboard frame, gift programs that people have earned points for certain items, a day off, paying for a seminar or class or book, a special parking space, a photograph of the employee/student/volunteer of the month, or a plaque with the names of the winners. People like to be appreciated and praised.

Suggestion programs can be used in a manner that provides real solutions for concerns or issues. If the person knows that their suggestion will be taken seriously then a true effort on their part will be made to offer ideas that can be put into productive use. Some firms offer a percentage of money related to cost savings. Others offer points (that equal dollars) towards gift items. Depending on the size of the firm and budget - ask the group what rewards they would like to receive. Get them involved from the start.

One man I worked for had coffee cups engraved with an encouraging slogan which he handed out personally to each person who had submitted an idea accompanied by realistic suggestions for equipment improvement, cost savings, better use of material and human resources, etc.

A lunch time idea is to poll employees to see what topics will be most helpful and interesting to them and then bring in experts to speak on those subjects. Speakers can be obtained for free from groups like Toastmasters, social service agencies, and clubs. Issues could include: career strategies, parenting issues, elder care options, continuing education opportunities, volunteer possibilities, and what organizations exist that might cater to their hobby. Demonstrating that you care about their needs and wants professionally and personally builds morale and likeability towards you.

On company time, you could ask other managers to take turns talking to groups about what their departments do so a better understanding can exist of how each area needs the other in order for the whole to work as a cohesive unit.

An effective test as to how good a listener you are, which makes you a good leader, is to sit down each Friday afternoon and write down three things you learned from employees (or whatever group) that week. Examples are: an insight about a customer; a better way to handle a process; why a

project didn't work out as planned; if there are internal issues going on. You can and should be continually learning from others in order to best determine what motivates them to work and succeed. As employees see you taking their efforts or suggestions seriously, they will be more motivated to be productive.

An interesting way to discover whether you are a motivating leader or not is to write a short "news story" about your work-related decisions. Don't worry about the quality of the writing - just capture the highlights of what you did: reviewing employees, disciplining, running meetings, dealing with supervisors, handing out praise and criticism, etc. Then, look at your "story". Would you be comfortable if it ran in your local paper? Would it be okay if your friends saw it? If you have no problem publishing your story, odds are you are managing and leading your employees and your career in an ethical manner. If you've been honest and discover that your methods might need to change - then do so. It's a good way to run a check and balances on yourself. If you are really brave - ask those around you to write the same "story" (and submit it anonymously if they wish) to compare their perspective to your own. It could be enlightening.

When a leader is promoted, he or she acknowledges that his or her promotion is a reflection of the good job everyone in the department had done and that it was the other people's work that had earned the leader's promotion. This person knows how to build bridges, not walls - very smart and effective.

You can develop a "cheat sheet" of questions to ask on a regular basis. This helps you to stay on top of what people are doing and how and why they're doing it. Use core questions for everyone and also customize the sheet for each individual. This should not be done just for show - act upon whatever comes up in these conversations.

Another innovative concept I found in my folder was for a manager to start a Professional Development Club. Assign each of your people a different industry-related trade publication. Have a regularly scheduled "reading meeting" and ask the people to relate any interesting stories, trends, or products they ncovered in their reading. Circulate the magazine assignments around so that each person uses their own perspective to discover what's happening outside the four walls they are used to.

After attending a conference or a trade show, come back and share the highlights with the rest of the group. Share your knowledge, your feelings about how things went, and what's new. If you expect people to work as a team, treat them as team members. This is also a great way for you to remember the material or main points of the event. You can offer the information via a presentation or through notes you distribute.

Hold monthly gripe sessions and encourage people to complain. If people aren't telling you then they are telling others or keeping it bottled up inside - neither of which is productive or good for quality relationships and workmanship. If logistically possible, don't hold it in a conference room or within any of the areas where you normally work or meet. People tend not to be as open when still on the main turf. And be sure you do it on the organization's time - not their personal time.

(2) Now, let's take a look at some of the more "frivolous and fun" ways to make your group of people feel special. This leads to a more enhanced atmosphere to establish the groundwork for other motivational techniques.

At some firms, a "surprise treat" day is held once a month. Ideas include renting a popcorn machine, serving everyone donuts or muffins with their favorite breakfast beverage at their desk, and delivering ice cream bars throughout the building. People look forward to the camaraderie and good cheer that results. It lifts up the spirits and returns a light heartedness to the workplace.

Offer spontaneous treats. Bring in cookies. Hire a musical or dancing group to entertain for 30 minutes. Ask a school teacher to bring by a class to perform for the group. Tie a balloon to each person's chair. Leave a small plant on each desk to be discovered in the morning. Get fortune cookies with specialized sayings pertinent to your group (I saw this advertised on a website). Candy bars wrapped with a special saying can also be effective. Hand out a bottle of bubbles to blow away troubles. These are simple ways to say thanks or hang in there. Some of these ideas came from Barbara Glanz's book, CARE Packages for the Workplace, Dozens of Little Things You Can Do to Regenerate Spirit in the Workplace. The article came from TRI Performance Improvement Systems' e-zine at <http://www.reinforce.com>. Other ideas I've used on my own with success. Honestly, I don't know who enjoyed them more, me or the recipients.

Have a monthly birthday party and circulate a card to get as many signatures as possible. Bring in a cake and share it with the immediate group.

Organize lunch time potlucks (or an inexpensive catered meal) periodically to foster socialization. Encourage people to sit with others they normally wouldn't get the chance to visit with. This intermingling is good for networking as well as reducing the barrier and attitude of them versus us that can prevail between departments.

(3) Then there are the altruistic methods you can use to help motivate people.

Develop a volunteer program where people are allowed and encouraged to take company time off to provide a community service. Some firms allow for a regular set time while others just do one or two days a year. Many times unknown strengths will surface. New friendships can be made. An understanding of what triggers people's interest can help you help them develop new skills or encourage them to move into another area where they can better utilize their expertise or talent.

When I was conducting classes at a local junior college, writing a column for the local newspaper and in-house newsletter, and giving speeches at clubs in town, I also pulled together material for lunch time workshops where I worked. This was educational for me and those who joined me because we shared our experiences and offered tips to try in different situations. Not only that, but because we came from different departments - we learned more about how we could help one another. It was gratifying and fun too.

I really liked this idea that I clipped out of a magazine. Create a "Days Off Bank" and use it to motivate people. Put a set amount of days into the bank. Allow colleagues to recognize the accomplishments of those around them by assigning them a "Dollar Day." When the agreed upon amount of Dollar Days are collected, the person can cash them in for a day off. This system will encourage others to recognize and appreciate peers who work hard. It will also build a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. By limiting the days in the bank, you prevent people from handing out Dollar Days unless they are warranted.

(4) The wrap-up. I hope I have stimulated your brain into thinking about more creative methods to motivating the people around you as well as motivating yourself to perhaps make some changes that will be appreciated by others you affect. Be imaginative. You don't have to spend a lot of time or money. Mix and match some of these suggestions to meet the needs of your groups. Ask for their input. If your goal is truly to motivate them - then let them choose what they'd like! Good luck and have more fun!

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