

# Can You Handle the Truth? Here's How You Can Motivate Your People More Effectively

Much has been written about how to motivate people. Some people think there is some type of magic that if they could only access, they could zap a new power into people. Sorry, but no.

There are various kinds of motivation. Coercive motivation for example can be quite effective. Remember this quote? “You can make a horse sit up and deal cards, it’s just a matter of voltage.” That was from Col. Nathan Jessep, played by Jack Nicholson in “A Few Good Men.” Later in the movie, Jessep famously exclaimed, “You can’t handle the truth!”

The truth is this: People are only motivated by what they value. Yes, that might be money, or saving their skin, but people remain motivated exclusively by what they value.

You can coerce people into doing what you want. Threats, punishment, and the rest of the “stick” methods are often used. “Restrictive motivation” is another stick method and somewhat of a cousin to “coercive motivation.” You can restrict liberty, freedom, access to information, things, people, or opportunity as punishment unless people do what is demanded.

On the more positive side, one can motivate by way of incentive or quid pro quo, which is “do this and I’ll give you that.” It really is sort of based on a bribe paradigm and the carrot-end of “the carrot vs. the stick” approach.

Offering a carrot or brandishing a stick will indeed get people to do things, but it is something difficult to sustain; and as Alfie Kohn demonstrates in his book “Punished by Rewards,” it does not work very well. People resist the stick and carrots become carrot cake then steak and carrots. Entitlement sets in and people expect steak, carrots, peas, potatoes and fine wine! And yes, fine wine gets expensive.

But there is a better way, a third way. You can’t motivate people – all you can do is understand their motives and align your behavior in such a way as to deliver what they want on a win-win basis. This is sustainable. Again, people are only motivated by what they value.

The typical manager thinks they have only two kinds of power (carrot and stick) available to them. But the carrot and the stick are accessible because of their position. “Do this or that because I’m the boss and I have a certain amount of authority over you,” they say. A good example is automobile dealerships, which use coercive, restrictive and incentive methods to persuade sales people to sell cars. This does not make these dealers good or bad, it just makes them typical of how business is done.

Referent power is based on a third idea and the greatest of things – love. “I will do for you, not because I feel a threat, either explicit or implied. I will not do for you because of some reward. I behave, work at my best and carry a certain winning attitude because I respect and want to serve ... you. I do what I do because I want you, my boss to be proud of me. I execute my duties with

care because I like the people I work with and want to contribute and not let them down. I behave as I do because what we do together has meaning.”

Can you see how referent power is the most powerful? The trick of course is how to deliberately create this values-based referent power in a workplace ... your workplace. There is not enough space here to describe all that goes into building a shared-values work environment, however, here are three things you can do now.

- 1. Make it safe:** Create a workplace where it is safe to tell the boss and co-workers the uncompromising truth, without fear of repercussion.
- 2. Give credit where credit is due:** This is the easiest thing to do and you can start now. Most people are not told they are appreciated and why they are appreciated.
- 3. Make expectations clear:** Unclear expectations are enormously de-motivating. Tell your people what is expected, by when, what a finished job looks like, what the failure and success paths are, what the resources are and then coach them on their way.

There are a number of other values that must be shared in the workplace in order to arrive at a credible referent power base - or what we call a “Heroic Environment.” But focusing on these first three steps can accomplish much. I wish you all the best on your journey.

#### **About the Author**

Peter Dove is a management consultant with a background in corporate culture design and serves as the president of Shared Values Associates, Inc. In this position, he travels the U.S. speaking to groups on the importance of “shared values,” which is a principle used by more than 250 corporations encouraging workplaces to focus on employee and customer needs. Dove teaches that high performance by employees is built through balancing Business Values™ and People Values™. Peter’s goal is to create heroic work environments so that both employee and employer get more of what they want.