



Live & Learn
HOW TO...

How to... motivate people to achieve results

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otivation is a slippery thing. There are as many motivating factors as there are people. Each of us has different levers, so what is a manager to do?

There are only two ways you can know how to motivate me. The first is to take a guess based on the latest management theory, or the last course you attended, or the book you read on the way to work. Alternatively, you can take the time to get to know me.

Even then, motivation is still a difficult force to understand and channel. Fortunately, the work of one brilliant psychologist shows us why motivation so often goes wrong. Victor Vroom's expectancy theory suggests that people can be motivated to behave in a certain way when they expect the outcome of that behaviour to result in a desirable reward.

Effort

The first element in the theory is effort. This is the work your colleague needs to put into the task at hand.

Performance

This is about the results that your colleague gets from the effort they put in. Problems can start to unfold if your colleague does not have enough confidence that putting in the effort will yield the performance you need.

Vroom called this 'expectancy'. If I think a task is unfairly demanding, I don't expect to succeed, so my motivation dips. Underestimating the power of expectancy is a common mistake of over-demanding managers. Unsurprisingly, it is especially prevalent in workplaces where people feel overstretched.

We must believe
that we will
be suitably
rewarded for
our efforts

By
Mike Clayton



Reward

The third element in the theory is the reward that you (or your organisation) promises for achieving the performance level that has been set. Performance issues are likely to arise if I don't believe that getting the results you asked of me will truly yield the reward you promised. Think back to times when managers promised bonuses, promotions or pay rises, which then failed to materialise. What effect did those broken promises have on the team's performance?

Vroom called this 'instrumentality' and noted that I need to believe that my performance will be instrumental in securing the promised reward.

Outcome

The last element of the theory is the outcome that I get from the effort I put in. What is critical here is the value – or 'valence' – of the reward you offer. If I don't believe the outcome is worth the effort, I won't be motivated to do the work.

So, while high rewards may not be motivating, low rewards certainly are demotivating.

Effective motivation

If you want to motivate me to achieve results, you need to set me a task where I believe the effort I put in will deliver the performance you expect. And I must believe that if I do achieve the performance you require, you will give the reward you promised. And, finally, I need to believe that the reward you promised is of enough value to justify the effort that I will need to make in the first place. ■

Mike Clayton is a speaker, management trainer and author of 14 books, including 'How to Speak so People Listen' and 'How to Influence in Any Situation'. See MikeClayton.co.uk and OnlinePMCourses.com