

# The elusive spark of motivation.

by Gianni Anchois

**Finding, keeping and  
nurturing your drive to act.**

## **What is motivation?**

Do you remember the feeling of starting a new project? And the surge of energy that motivates you to begin? The excitement, the sketchy plans, the ideas, the rush of adrenaline in the morning when you just can't wait to get to work? It's a wonderful feeling and state of mind. You feel empowered, unstoppable in your determination. You feel alive.

Then the days go by, and then the weeks. Little by little you have to rely on your memory to re-create the original stimulus. Then one day you get up and you feel empty. Your motivation is gone.

Your project needs to be carried to completion, but where can you find the energy to replenish your motivation to do so?

## **What really motivates us?**

Granted, we all might have different and unique triggers. There is however a set of indicators that broadly apply to all of us, I think.

Financial motivation: salary, incentive schemes, bonus, perks and benefits. This usually is just an illusion. It lasts briefly, and can actually drive you to make harsh decisions when you feel any of these elements are falling below your expectations. I call this bogus or self-delusional motivation.

Non-financial motivation: involvement in leading edge projects, visibility to leadership team, cooperation with bright and motivated colleagues. Promotion and career opportunity, confidence in management and leadership, and quality of relationship with your supervisor are also powerful motivators.

Then there are other elements that should be considered.

Autonomy, for example, is a very strong influencing factor to boosting motivation. Note that working in autonomy is different from working alone, and it's also different from non-bothering your boss too much. It means that you are able to organise yourself and your work, that you understand the requirements and the expected outcomes, and that you can plan and execute according to the higher standards, on your schedule but generally matching the overall plan. You know how to avoid surprises, solve problems and generally pick yourself up if you fall for any reason, directly or indirectly under your control.

Mastery is another interesting element. As you progress in your career, you naturally will be involved with more challenging projects and duties which will require you to hone your skills and learn or develop new ones. A working environment that facilitates your personal and professional development in this direction will motivate you to keep curiously aiming for continuous improvement. You only stop when you master your craft.

And finally there is purpose, arguably the most important one. You have a clear, measurable understanding about how your work fits into the bigger picture. Your work is visible to others, and it's instrumental to the success of the broader team, department or even company. Your work can make a tangible and measurable difference, and your efforts are clearly put into perspective by what you do (and just as importantly, by

what you do not do). Purpose is also about the bigger impact of what you do on society at large.

The higher the purpose, the higher the responsibility to yourself and to others.

### **Can we motivate others?**

The short answer is no, I don't think we can.

What we can do, however, is to setup the right environment, ethical background, conditions and set of rules for employees to identify, develop, nurture and boost their own motivation triggers. As managers and leaders, we can share what motivates us and champion the right attitude toward improving ourselves. Most important of all, people managers should stop de-motivating. Speaking from experience, it's always the management's fault both in terms of policies and procedures when employees feel demotivated and detached.

So what could be the right steps?

Well, for example to instill a clear, credible and inspiring purpose is a good start. Recognising a job well done and acting as facilitators to help completing the assigned duties are also important steps. Coaching employees for improvement will work wonders in helping them hone their mastery. Clear, frequent and personal communications will represent the stepping stone for building a credible, honest rapport.

Finally allow enough freedom — or latency, or even slack — for employees to become autonomously mature and find their own motivational triggers.

### **Counteracting the loss of motivation**

A recent report from Gallup estimates that in the average large organisations, about 1/3 of employees are truly engaged, 1/2 of them are not engaged and approximately 1/5 are actively disengaged. Can you imagine the staggering loss of potential productivity of the workforce?

So how do we counteract this state of things?

There's no magic involved, I'm afraid. It boils down to really paying attention to the main triggers of motivation. Praise employees often when you have a sense that they are making good progress. Reward their ability to overcome hurdles, support them when their moods are at the lowest point, for example when facing roadblocks.

Protect them from unwanted distractions (no need-to-know emails or pointless interruptions please!), stick to your objectives and always be decisive and quick when your intervention is required. Manage the time pressure: don't just burden your team by passing on whatever pressure is applied to you.

Cultivate a culture of helpfulness and unselfishness to make sure that the positive energy will bounce — and get amplified — from one team member to the other. Let them become the masters of their trade, and provide directions only when you get asked.

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### **Staying motivated**

When all is said and done, I think a healthy cycle of high motivation and mild de-motivation is actually what most of us will experience.

Going from high to high is a myth, I'm not even sure that you can consistently enjoy the highs if you never experience the lows.

What I recommend is to restlessly seek your inner motivational triggers and nurture them on a daily basis when you have identified them.

Simple things like reading an article, a book or listening to a podcast can really awake your motivation. Just like talking to successful people who already did what you hope to accomplish. Surround yourself with positive individuals and befriend them. Challenge yourself on finding new, innovative ways to do the same old things.

Set yourself a demanding objective and bask in the satisfaction of a job well done when you complete it. Ultimately motivation is very personal, but then again, so is life.

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