



ACCOUNTING & BUSINESS HEARS FROM
KAISEN CONSULTING

Motivation: what are the essential principles?

The shelves of bookstores from Aberdeen to Adelaide are groaning with expert opinion on how to motivate employees. So vast is the library of motivational literature, a sub-species of book has evolved, summarising the most popular theories in a “Motivation, the Greatest Hits” fashion.

Even so, exhaustive bedtime hours spent reading the best motivational science this multi-million pound industry has to offer can still leave a manager bewildered and uncertain as to “where their cheese has actually been moved.”

Enter the management guru and a rousing if crippling expensive seminar, the principles of which invariably never quite map onto your own business. Or you can always try dragging your staff out onto a windswept moor for a hellish survival weekend, conducted by a group of gimlet-eyed former mercenaries. If that fails to inspire your employees in your Feng Shui'd open plan office, you can try getting them to run across hot coals.

What the modern manager yearns for is a knife to cut through the Gordian Knot of confusing, contradictory, so-called management science. They seek a Holy Grail motivational theory of elegant, common sense ideas that don't cost the earth and tend to work every time.

But, according to leading business psychologists Kaisen Consulting, effective management is no Black Art.

“We all need to know what we should be doing, why, and where our role fits into the company structure. We crave feedback to acknowledge our successes and to help us overcome any difficulties. Most importantly, we need to experience a sense of real involvement and responsibility in the operation of the business for which we work—then we begin to feel we own our jobs and have a degree of mastery over our own destinies,” says Kaisen's Gwyn Rogers.

“As employees, we require direction, job clarity, client focus, competence, resources, empowerment, involvement, co-operation, feedback and recognition—effectively they represent a kind of ‘10 Commandments of Management’—10 ways to release the potential of your people, to ensure they are fulfilled and productive.

“Meeting these needs leads to a more tangible and enduring benefit in terms of employee motivation than many of the experiential activities such as fire walking or survival programmes. And the best news is that there is a direct link with your business’ bottom line,” he says.

Kaisen Consulting believes one of the reasons there is so much conflicting advice on management is because few managers are actually trained to manage. Successful in less senior roles, they find themselves promoted into positions where they are responsible for the stewardship of others.

“We should forgive before we condemn. The person trained and excellent as an engineer may not be so effective when they are promoted to Head of Research and Development. Given no management training, they have not been given the right resources for their leadership role and they may not be getting the feedback from their own bosses to help them develop their own skills as managers,” says Gwyn Rogers.

“We measure these 10 principles using a ‘People Enablement Index’, against which managers can gauge their own performance and focus on those areas they need to confront to make sure their people are effective and fulfilled and their clients are satisfied.

1. Direction Having clear direction reduces uncertainty and gives meaning to people’s work. Effective leaders communicate a clear vision and direction. Without them, infighting and office politics run rampant, people are reluctant to commit themselves—to “psychologically contract” themselves to their work.

2. Job clarity Having clear and achievable goals motivates people, particularly if they are challenging. Without them, people operate inefficiently and less productively. Ultimately they get stressed if they don’t know what’s expected of them, leading to absenteeism, sickness and low morale.

3. Client focus Meeting clients’ needs creates a sense of purpose for staff and reassures them that their work is useful. For people to understand who they are trying to please, they must be able to “connect” with the client. Client focus gives them a clear understanding of how their role meets the needs of the company’s clients.

4. Competence Having the knowledge and skills to do a job generates confidence—people need to feel capable of something. Confirmation of people’s competence is a strong motivator; without it, people can be more prone to making mistakes and can suffer from performance anxiety. They can also become conditioned to act in a helpless manner.

5. Resources Providing staff with the resources to do the job signals that their needs are important. Without the right resources, employees feel that they are not

cared for. In certain circumstances they may too readily use the lack of resources as an excuse for poor performance. For example, simple things like access to a computer, a proper workstation and an attractive workplace environment contribute to making people feel they’re valued.

6. Empowerment We shouldn’t cause people to “leave their brains at the door”. Being empowered gives people a sense of freedom to make choices and control over their environment. Employees who are not empowered can lack responsiveness to clients, deliver service by rote, resist taking responsibility and fail to respond adequately to change. People become dependent if they are not treated as adults.

7. Involvement Being consulted and involved helps people to feel committed to what they are doing and able to offer ideas. People who are consulted about job targets typically display greater commitment to achieving them. A lack of involvement stops staff highlighting obvious problem areas or identifying improvements as well as reducing their creativity.

8. Co-operation Having relaxed and uncompetitive working relationships is a signal to people that they are accepted as part of a social group. Social belonging is a very powerful motivator for many people. Without it, departments are prone to becoming “insular”, seeing other parts of the same organisation as “the enemy”.

9. Feedback We are not naturally good at this in the UK. We must get better at telling people they’ve done a good job. Feedback helps people to know how they are doing and what they need to learn. Without it people are disinclined to take risks, are reluctant to embrace change and their performance never improves.

10. Recognition This is the emotional side of feedback and another black mark for British managers. Giving staff recognition for their contribution makes them feel valued. If people don’t feel appreciated, their motivation tails off rapidly, leading to people who put in minimum effort to “keep out of trouble”. In extreme cases, people become depressed, resentful and embittered, searching for ways of sabotaging the organisation before they eventually leave to find new jobs.

“These 10 principles are about giving your people an opportunity to do their job properly, feel valued doing it and be recognised for doing it well,” says Gwyn Rogers.

“Using this People Enablement Index will produce measurable results down the line. Management theory of whatever stripe is no good unless it produces outcomes. We have worked very carefully to design these principles so any manager can adopt them and start leading a more effective and successful workforce to better results.”

Kaisen Consulting works with clients in more than 30 countries around the world assessing senior managers, developing one-to-one management skills, designing and implementing large-scale recruitment and assessment processes, achieving rapid organisational change and surveying employee perceptions. Clients include airlines, telecommunication companies, partnerships, utilities and professional banks. www.kaisen.co.uk