

# The Art of Motivating Others

A Companion to the INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT Seminar

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Your firm hires only those who have achieved significant academic and personal success. Yet once employed, there are some (often too many) who seem incapable of producing optimal work product or mastering the skills required to progress. Senior attorneys are both baffled and frustrated by this result, recognizing the costs to the firm, to productivity, and ultimately to the careers of these associates. A common assessment is that these individuals lack sufficient **motivation** to perform successfully.

Generally, we look at individual performance management practices when trying to determine why associates are not motivated to be productive or develop necessary skills. Peter Drucker tells us, “Management exists only for the sake of institutional results.”<sup>1</sup> If results recognized are not consistent with goals, management practices employed and their impact on associate motivation is rightly one focus of attention. When the quality of the work product is poor or productivity is low, accountability for such results will rest squarely on the shoulders of supervisory attorneys. To improve management practices, supervisors will need to analyze the factors that influence these results. Having done that, they can assess which among those factors are affected by their supervision practices. The three most likely factors to influence the quality of an individual’s motivation are these:

**Characteristics of the individual:** Attributes of the population that predict the way in which a person will approach work, and the pace at which they may be expected to develop skills. Attorney population attributes are influenced by trends such as the law school applicant pool<sup>2</sup>, law school demographics suggesting that women may soon be in the majority<sup>3</sup>, and specific selection criteria applied by your firm in the recruitment process.

**Nature of the work:** The substance of a typical associate’s workload and the way in which it affects his/her motivation. The nature of typical assignments has changed substantially for many firms, influenced by a shift toward larger cases, the increased pace of work caused by client demands for immediacy, and limitations on work for which the firm may bill.

**Environment:** The environment is the physical and emotional nature of the workplace. Aspects of the environment in which an attorney works clearly have impact on his/her motivation.

This last factor, the environment, is the factor over which senior attorneys have the most control. Supervisors shape associates’ work environment as they assign work, monitor progress, and provide feedback. These management behaviors, employed effectively, are the keys to motivating individual performance. Motivation is a complex topic. To better understand its nuances, we can explore classic motivation theory.

## Identifying and Applying Appropriate Motivators

Motivation is the drive that makes us want to produce high quality work and grow in skill and knowledge. When supervisors are able to motivate subordinates, it results in an increase in their desire to be productive and successful. Determining what might motivate an individual can be a challenge. Individuals who share many characteristics may be motivated by very different incentives—even those who work in the same

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<sup>1</sup> Drucker, Peter F., Management Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Harper Business, New York, New York, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Law School Admissions Council reported a decline of 30,000 applications from 1989 to 1998. Recent reports from the LSAC show that applications rose 3% in 1999 and 2% in 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Glater, Jonathon D., “*Women Are Close to Being Majority of Law Students*,” New York Times, March 26, 2001.

environment, on similar tasks. The best management strategies develop from a foundation of understanding which motivator corresponds to the reward valued by a particular individual. There are five motivational conditions, each with an attendant reward expectation (see Figure I.1. Motivational Conditions and Rewards<sup>4</sup>).

**Figure I.1. Motivational Conditions and Rewards**

<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Reward</b>
Achievement	Success
Anxiety/fear	Avoidance of failure
Approval	Praise/acceptance
Curiosity	Exposure to interesting work
Acquisitiveness	Tangible material benefit

To apply this base of knowledge, think about your own motivational conditions. What motivates you to succeed? Is it money, interesting work, or the camaraderie of the firm environment? More than likely, it is some combination of the motivations and rewards shown in Figure I.1. Motivation is a very complex issue and is influenced by a variety of factors. For example, you may be motivated to do boring work if you have the opportunity to work with someone you really like, but that motivation may fade over time if the nature of the work does not change. Motivators do not remain static and are situational in nature. Supervisors may find that they have dissimilar experiences with a given person when they apply different motivation/reward conditions. The supervisor's challenge is to identify the core motivators of each individual at a given time.

### **The Impact of Management Style on Motivation**

Identifying what might motivate a junior attorney involves understanding what types of rewards he/she values. What do they want from their employment experience or from the supervisory relationship? The answers will guide you in assessing how to motivate this individual. Failure to consider the individual's unique motivators can result in two supervisors having very different experiences with the same individual. Consider this scenario:

A group leader is trying to assess Joan's performance for her formal evaluation. Reading over the evaluation comments, he is perplexed by the range of opinions among partners she has worked for. Partners A and B are the furthest apart on their assessment of her contribution. Partner A thinks she walks on water, using her whenever possible to organize complex research projects and outline core issues for his litigation team. Partner B's assessment is just the opposite. He finds her approach to work too unstructured. On a recent project, he was annoyed when she came to him with question after question.

Partner A's style of supervision is to give subordinates the broad parameters for an assignment, encouraging them to check in regularly to discuss progress and issues. He wants junior associates to learn to investigate a range of options, arriving at the core issues through discussions with him and others on the team. Partner B's style is to prepare meticulous issue lists, to point the associate to the exact issues he believes are central to the research, and to describe his specific expectations for the final work product.

Why have these partners had such dissimilar experiences with an associate who appears to be talented? *What do you think motivates Joan?*

It appears that Joan may be motivated by curiosity and approval. She enjoys the hunt for information and is energized by the interpersonal contact of Partner A's discussion sessions. She

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Atkinson's Theory of Motivation as discussed in, An Introduction to Motivation, Atkinson, J.W., Van Nostrand, Princeton, N.J., 1964.

may be an individual who learns best through discourse rather than through written instruction. Conversely, she becomes unmotivated when given too much structure—going through the motions, but only producing the minimum required. In this case, Partner B’s style stifles Joan’s personal motivation to produce optimal work.

### **Which Partner was Right?**

Neither Partner A or Partner B employed the *correct* management style because there is no one correct course. But Partner A used a style of supervision that motivated Joan to produce her best work. Another associate might have responded more positively to Partner B’s style. You may wonder how you will be able to assess what might motivate a given individual, but it is easier than you might think. Employing two simple methods of assessment should provide you with the information you need to supervise effectively. First, you need to observe the individual, looking for the projects and supervisory style that seem to bring out the best in him/her. Second, ask one or two questions when giving an assignment, such as:

- *How can I help you do your best work on this project?*
- *What is your approach to this type of assignment?*

The answers should open a channel of communication between you and the assignee that will allow you to share critical information on expectations and working styles. Encourage the associate to describe the type of working environment that inspires him/her to do optimal work. Let him/her know your style of supervision and discuss the best ways for the two of you to work together. Arrive at a shared view of how to proceed so that each of you may use your time and skills most effectively. It is possible to impose standards of performance and set high expectations without destroying motivation.

### **Supervisory Style Self-Assessment**

Partners A and B each exhibited their own unique style of supervision. There are many effective styles, but the most productive supervisors find that rigid adherence to one style may not yield the best results. It is useful to identify your instinctual style and consider ways it might be adapted to meet the needs of individuals who may require differing motivational conditions. You cannot be expected to completely change your management style for each person you supervise, but you should be able to modify your approach enough to yield optimal results. You begin by looking at the way in which you interact with others as you delegate assignments and monitor ongoing work production. Answer these questions:

- How closely or loosely do you manage those working for you?
- How much feedback do you give and on what are you most likely to comment?
- What would your subordinates say you value and reward most consistently?
- How do you reward those who produce top quality work?

You may find that you are not the best person to make this assessment or that you have incomplete information. Seek feedback from others who know you well and from those whose management skills you respect. Ask attorneys with whom you have worked or who have worked for you in the past to describe the nature of your supervisory style. Encourage them to discuss aspects of your supervisory approach that enhanced or detracted from the experience. Researchers have found that it is possible to identify patterns of supervisory behaviors, predicting the way a person will behave as a supervisor and the rewards he or she will be seeking.

To gain a better understanding of your own style, see Figure I.2. Four Styles of Management<sup>5</sup> for descriptors of four different approaches to supervision. These styles have been adapted to the realities of the law firm work environment using Daniel Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence model.<sup>6</sup> They reflect my

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from concepts presented in, “*Leadership That Gets Results*,” Goleman, Daniel, Harvard Business Review, Volume 78, Number 2, March-April, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Goleman, Daniel, Working With Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, New York, 1998.

observations of supervisory behavior patterns most frequently in evidence in a large law firm. One of these types probably comes close to your preferred style. Look closely at who is motivated by each style and the perceived rewards of each of these supervisory personality constructs.

**Figure I.2. Four Styles of Management**

<b>STYLE</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>WHO IS MOTIVATED BY THIS STYLE? <i>WHAT IS THE REWARD?</i></b>
Pacesetter	Works harder, longer than anyone. Sets high expectations and is quick to criticize. Rewards top performers with best work.	Acquisitive <i>Access to the best work</i> Anxiety/Fear <i>Avoidance of Failure</i>
Democratic	Seeks consensus. Gives lots of feedback and encourages questions. Gives juniors high level of responsibility and works only with people he/she likes.	Approval <i>Praise and acceptance</i> Curiosity <i>Responsibility to guide work</i>
Benevolent Dictator	Establishes authority, but gives subordinates much responsibility. Supports ongoing efforts and provides structure. Helps best performers to set high goals and seek out new challenges.	Achievement <i>Setting and reaching goals</i> Approval <i>Support and guidance</i>
CEO	Extremely organized with great attention to detail. Gives clear directions, values teamwork, and provides lots of structure. Rewards those who contribute to the team and who do not vary from the plan.	Achievement <i>Knows expected outcome</i> Approval <i>Become part of the team</i>

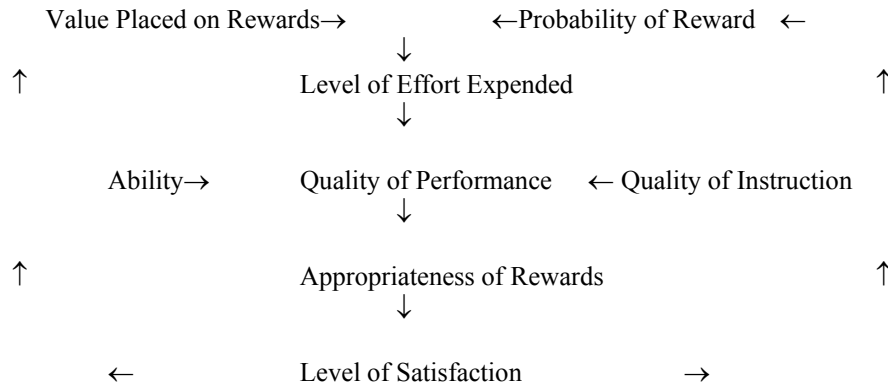
These categories are rarely static or as clearly defined as you see them here. You may exhibit some Pacesetter behaviors, but also some CEO behaviors. They are meant to provide structure to your assessment of your personal approach to supervision and to help you recognize how you motivate your subordinates. To this point, we have discussed the correlation between motivation and producing high quality work but we have not discussed exactly how it works.

**Using Motivators to Enhance Long-Term Performance**

Understanding the relation of motivation to outcome, much can be learned by studying the pattern that is suggested by the application of incentives/rewards in the work process. See Figure I.3., The Porter and

Lawler Motivation-Performance-Satisfaction Model<sup>7</sup>, for a visual that describes the interrelationship between motivation and level of effort.

**Figure I.3. The Porter and Lawler Motivation-Performance-Satisfaction Model**



This model was developed to describe the motivations of managerial level personnel. It assumes that individuals place an inherent value on certain types of rewards, and their motivation to perform depends on the potential for them to receive those rewards. The higher the value placed on the reward and the greater expectancy of receiving it, the greater the effort expended. But the researchers also found that the level of effort employed did not always result in optimal performance. If an individual lacked ability or the quality of instruction was poor, there was a higher probability of substandard performance. Control can be exerted on the quality of instruction, the nature of the rewards, and the consistency of the rewards. It is clear that a supervisor can influence the quality of performance by understanding the motivation-reward equation for an associate. This is the kind of control that the supervisor exerts over the associate work environment.

### Summary

Motivating others is truly an art. Finding the best way to motivate the attorneys under your supervision is the key to managing individual performance. Through constructive delegation practices, conscientious work monitoring, and the provision of meaningful feedback, you can motivate others to perform to the extent of their ability. These supervisory skills will serve as the foundation for excellence in overall associate management, mentoring, and professional development. Well-managed attorneys are motivated to continue developing skills to meet the firm’s evolving expectations and good managers are under less stress because they have a motivated, well-trained workforce in place.

### Key Points on Motivating Others

- The quality of an individual’s performance is directly influenced by the quality of supervision he or she receives;
- Assessment of the quality of supervision is measured by its outcomes, *e.g.* optimal work product, appropriate skill development, effective client relations, functional team behaviors;
- Motivation determines productivity and motivators are unique to each individual;
- Supervisors have an instinctual style, with unique motivational conditions and rewards;
- The level of motivation exhibited is directly tied to the quality of instruction the junior attorney has received; and
- Improving one’s effectiveness in motivating others is a function of adapting supervisory style to the unique motivational conditions and learning style of the subordinate.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from theories presented in, Managerial Attitudes and Performance, Porter, Lyman W. and Lawler, Edward E., Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, 1968.