

Motivate the Masses:
Experiencing is Believing

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You can't make people change, and rewards and punishment either don't work or are short lived—the only thing that works is people's intrinsic motivation, and you have to get at this indirectly.

So far we have looked at deliberate practice as the crucible of learning, and empathetic resolute leadership committed to making learning better and better. But what is going to motivate the masses? Impressive empathy is a start, but you also need something to actually engage people. The big change problem, then, is how to get people to put in the energy to improve a situation when a lot of them don't want to do it. How do you get people to change their minds? Grasping the essence of quality change processes is the focus of this chapter.

Machiavelli had it right five hundred years ago. When people contemplate new ideas, he observed, they are “generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tested them by experience” (1515, 1961). The key word here is experience. Grasping change involves giving people new experiences that they end up finding intrinsically fulfilling. Once again we are back to practice rather than theory as the driver.

<p>Key Insight 3: Realized effectiveness is what motivates people to do more.</p>

In other words it is not inspiring visions, moral exhortation, or mounds of irrefutable evidence that convince people to change, it is the actual experience of being more effective that spurs them to repeat and build on the behavior. People can get fantastically excited and inspired, as many did when Barack Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008. But change is only a mirage unless people actually experience the reality of improvement. If that happens, they will expect and do even more. Motivated people do get better implementation, but interestingly the reverse can be more powerful. Helping people accomplish something that they have never accomplished before causes motivation to increase deeply. Such newly found motivation is tantamount to passionate commitment that is further contagious to others.

There is often a tension between resolute leaders and the group development. By definition, the former are determined to get on with it, and thus can become impatient with those who are hesitant to get involved. Grasping change reconciles this potential conflict because those leaders who are change savvy know that they cannot become successful without the collective commitment and ingenuity of the group. This collectivity is seen not as a nuisance but rather as a necessity. Galvanizing motivation is the essential task of the change leader.

The resolute leader who is change savvy helps people try new things under relatively nonthreatening conditions, and listen to and learns from their reactions. He or she kick-starts the change process, often acting as the initial ignition. But the process will never go anywhere unless the leader figures out how to develop ownership within the group, and I use the word group advisedly because the driver of sustainability is the peer culture. Put another way, at the beginning of a given change process the leader is key to get things going—all successful change eventually must revolve around collective ownership. Central leadership is

still important but it fosters and relies increasingly on the peer culture to achieve deep change.

Finding Effective Motivators

Let's start with the basics: what motivates people? Daniel Pink provides us with the foundation when he identifies three sources of motivation: biological drive, extrinsic rewards (incentives and punishment), and intrinsic rewards (things that make us feel good just by doing them). One example of an incentive/punishment motivator is merit or performance pay. Rewards and punishment have a place under conditions of seriously limited capacity, such as where few people have the necessary skills and often do not show up for work, as is the case with teachers in some developing countries.

But if you want substantial and continuous improvement extrinsic motivators have limited effectiveness. Pink reports on several experiments, all of which led to the same conclusion. One involved an experiment in India in which participants were asked to do several tasks (unscrambling anagrams, tossing tennis balls at a target, and so forth). They were divided into three groups who received low, medium, and high financial rewards tied to reaching performance targets. There was no difference in the success of the low and medium groups but "in eight of the nine tasks ... examined over the three experiments, higher incentives led to worse performance" (Pink, p. 41, italics original). Another example: when women were invited to give blood, with one group being paid, and the other voluntary, only 30% of the former group decided to give blood, compared with 52% of the latter. Pink observes that the rewards "crowded out the intrinsic desire to do something good" (p. 48). Extrinsic rewards, in other words, narrows the reasons for doing something and makes it unlikely that the reason for the effort is coming from inside people.

After examining evidence from several other studies, Pink summarizes the findings as the “seven deadly flaws” of using carrot-and-stick incentive systems:

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
2. They can diminish performance.
3. They can crush creativity.
4. They can crowd out good behavior.
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior.
6. They can become addictive.
7. They can foster short-term thinking.

So, we know what doesn't work. But the mere act of inviting people to engage in activities for their intrinsic satisfaction will not, by itself, do the trick either. Therefore the question becomes under what conditions will intrinsic rewards flourish. There are four core ingredients essential for intrinsic motivation to have a chance of kicking in—the first three of which are identified by Pink. For starters the work must carry with it a strong sense of purpose. Once their basic needs are met the vast majority of people want to do something of value. They want to do something that is meaningful. Second, people find that getting better at something that is important is intrinsically satisfying. Let's call that increased capacity. Third, there needs to be a degree of autonomy so that people can exercise judgment in making headway. The fourth element, which Pink mentions but does not highlight, is being well connected to others in the pursuit of significant goals—what we can call camaraderie in relation to accomplishing purpose. This collective capacity is crucial for deep and sustainable success.

These are the ingredients, but how do you realize them? This gets us back to our practitioner-driven base. To bring intrinsic satisfaction to the fore, change leaders must help create the experiences that turn out

to be motivating because people find them emotionally meaningful relative to their values and their ability to fulfill them. It is not that the task becomes simplified but rather that it becomes directionally clear to the point that enabling the new experiences will further increase clarity, skill, and accomplishment through action. These outcomes are tantamount to the kind of ownership that comes from intrinsic motivation.

When Jamie McCracken became director of education of the Ottawa Catholic District School Board in 2003, he did exactly that. He took over a system that was “clenched,” to use his word. He then set out to unleash the energy and commitment of the group. With input from the masses, he identified three core priorities: student success, staff success, and stewardship of resources. To underscore their importance, he also stated that the three goals would remain the same for all seven years of his tenure. McCracken committed, in other words, to stay the course.

But that is still just talk. To be successful McCracken had to help make these goals a real part of people’s everyday experiences. So now we arrive at the real question: How do you galvanize motivation when you have the direction right but people are skeptical of whether it will happen—or even doubt that it is a good idea?

We have developed such a process, which we call “motion leadership.” It proactively shapes and trusts the “ready–fire–aim” process. Ready is directional; it identifies some core goals as priorities. But rather than forcing the ideas, motion leadership “trusts the process,” knowing that an effective change leader can greatly influence what happens. The process predictably generates intrinsic commitment and collective identity, both of which are powerful steering and sustaining forces. Leaders can still have (and should have) “aspirational visions,” but they need to pursue them indirectly, looking for opportunities to activate and

align the needs of individuals and the group. Forcing the process will be counterproductive. Engaging with it along the lines suggested in the next section will produce deeper and more lasting results.

Essentially the effective change leader activates, enables, and mobilizes human and moral purpose and the skills to enact them. Here is an illustration of the kind of motivation to which I am referring. Schwarz and Sharpe (2010), in writing about “practical wisdom” (a theme that resonates with the change leader focus of my book), report on “the wise custodian.”

Schwartz and Sharpe tell us about an interview with Luke, a custodian at a major teaching hospital. Luke talks about the time when he cleaned a young comatose patient’s room, but the patient’s father, who had been keeping a vigil for months, hadn’t seen him do it, and snapped at him for not cleaning the room. So Luke did it again, graciously. When asked to explain why, here is what Luke said:

I kind of knew the situation about his son. His son had been here for a long time and ... from what I hear, had got into a fight and he was paralyzed ... and he was in a coma and wasn’t coming out of the coma ... Well ... I went and cleaned his room. His father would stay here every day, all day, but he smoked cigarettes. So, he went out to smoke ... and after I cleaned the room he came back ... I ran into him in the hall and he just freaked out ... and telling me I didn’t do it ... and all this stuff. And at first, I got on the defensive, and was going to argue with him. But I don’t know. Something caught me and I said, “I’m sorry, I’ll go clean the room.”

[After a probe from the interviewer, Luke said], Yea I cleaned it so he could see me clean it ... I can understand how he could be. It

was like six months that his son was here. He's a little frustrated, and I cleaned it again. But I wasn't angry with him. I guess I could understand. (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010, pp. 13-14).

As the authors point out, Luke's job says nothing directly about responsibility and care for patients. Luke knew that cleaning rooms was his real job, but he had figured out that another central part of his job was to make patients and their families feel comfortable, to divert them, cheer them up when they were down, and so on. A wise person, says Schwartz and Sharpe, knows the deeper aims of what they are doing, is perceptive and can improve, uses emotions as an ally of reason, and learns from experience.

This is the kind of learning that can't be directly taught. But change leaders can shape the conditions and processes that will "cause" it to be learned. Change leaders, or system changers, as Schwartz and Sharpe call them, "have to build institutions with the culture and organization to encourage wisdom in everyday practice. They have to create communities of practitioners who not only nurture moral skill but help inspire moral will, the commitment to do right by those the practitioners serve" (p. 272).

Thus, motion leadership causes positive movement. It creates a process and a set of conditions that foster moral will and skill, as well as technical expertise. It builds these aspects into the culture by increasing the likelihood that peers will influence peers with respect to both moral will and technical expertise. In short, motion leadership increases intrinsic motivation and identity that results in collective ownership commitment to keep going. Motion leadership generates new energy within the group to reach new heights, which is achievable because

individuals, the group, and its leaders collectively want more, and know that it can be had.