Team-Specific Motivation: Discovering Your Team's Biggest Motivators

Learn how to motivate your team effectively.

Each person in your team is unique, and they are all motivated to succeed by different things.

However, chances are that there are some common factors that motivate everyone in your team. And, once you have uncovered these top motivators, you can focus on them to bring out the very best in everyone.

So, how can you identify your team's top motivators?

One way to do this is with the "Team-Specific Motivation" exercise. We'll look at how you can use this tool in this article.

Note:

Many researchers have studied workplace motivation, and they have drawn important, useful conclusions. However, they have often made subtly different recommendations about how managers should motivate people, perhaps because they have based their research on different sample populations.

At Mind Tools, we believe that each individual has unique motivations, but that there are often common motivators within teams, or among people who do similar types of work. By dealing with motivation at a team level, managers can prioritize their motivational activities to have the greatest possible impact – hence, this tool.

How to use the Tool

Follow the steps below to use the Team-Specific Motivation exercise.

Step 1: Gather Your Team

Your first step is to bring your team together. Make sure that there is a whiteboard or flip chart that you can use to record ideas during the discussion.

Explain the goals of the meeting: to identify the top factors for job satisfaction, and motivation, within your team.

Everyone should be encouraged to participate in the meeting, and to be heard. Make sure that everyone understands that there are no right or wrong answers!

Tip:

If you're doing this with people from several different teams, ask them to work through the exercise and present an answer within their own teams (for example, sales, IT and HR). This will give you specific responses from each "type" of team.

Step 2: Ask for Motivators

Next, go around the room and ask each person what sort of things motivate them. These could be obvious motivators like money, promotion prospects, recognition, achievement, growth, and good relationships, but it could also include other things, such as flexible working arrangements, or the opportunity to bring dogs to work.

Encourage your team members to come up with as many motivators as possible, including ones that they think motivate people they know. This will give you the most comprehensive list of motivators possible.

Take a look at the ideas as a group once your team is finished, and consolidate similar ideas, so that people don't select them multiple times in the next stage of the exercise.

Step 3: Clarify Suggestions

Once you've simplified the list, go through each motivator and make sure that everyone understands what it means or implies.

For example, someone might have suggested flexible working arrangements as a motivator. But what does this mean to others? One person might interpret this as the option to telecommute, while another might see it as a way to start earlier and finish work later to avoid rush-hour traffic.

Step 4: Prioritize Motivators

Ask each team member to go through the list on their own, choose their top five motivators, and rank them in order, with one being the least important and five the most important.

Next, ask them to mark these scores against the motivator on the whiteboard or flip chart. When each person has publicly scored their motivators, tally up the scores to identify the team's top five.

Using Your Findings

After you have identified the top five motivators for your team, find ways to apply them.

Below, we've listed some common motivators, along with tools and suggestions that you can use to motivate your team.

Responsibility

Give your team more responsibility by assigning challenging projects, or by progressively stepping back and delegating more. Greater responsibility often leads to an increased sense of personal power, self-confidence and integrity.

Support/Resources/Training

If your team members are motivated by receiving more support and resources, find out what they need to do their job more effectively and to excel. Ask them to identify their biggest frustrations at work. What can you do to minimize or eliminate these issues or bottlenecks? If they're motivated by personal or career growth, you can conduct a training needs assessment exercise.

Career Progression/Advancement

Assign tasks or projects that will give people new skills or stretch their existing ones, and give team members the opportunity to work on projects that test their abilities. Let them lead new projects on a rotating basis, and give (with appropriate risk management) everyone who's interested an opportunity to lead the group.

Achievement/Sense of Progress

People often lose their enthusiasm and motivation when they don't see any noticeable progression towards their goals or objectives. This is why it's important for your team to achieve regular wins during the course of a new project.

Remember to recognize team members' success publicly, if appropriate, and say "thank you" for their hard work. This is likely to bolster your team members' morale, and build their sense of achievement.

Meaning/Purpose

People who experience a deep sense of meaning and purpose in their work often feel more energized and engaged, and are more efficient. You can encourage

your people to find purpose in their work by writing a team mission and vision statement that describe the human benefits of the team's work.

Interesting Work

When was the last time your team worked on a really interesting, or unique, project? If it's been a while, your people might yearn to be involved in some diverse projects. Ask them how they define "interesting work," and collectively come up with ways that you can add any projects or tasks to their schedules.

Work Conditions

Do your team members have a healthy, comfortable and enjoyable place to work? Minimize workspace stress by eliminating distracting background noises, and make sure that each person's workspace has good ergonomics and is pleasant. Paint the walls bright, cheerful colors and make sure that there is plenty of natural light. Bring in plants and inspiring artwork to help lift people's moods.

Good Relationships

Good relationships at work are important for happiness, engagement and productivity. Help people build good work relationships by scheduling team activities, so that everyone can get to know each other better. For example, you could organize an away day, or simply get people together after work or on a coffee break. Allow time before meetings for team members to chat and connect. And you should get involved in these discussions too.

Tip 1:

Although it's important to use specific strategies to motivate your team, keep in mind that your efforts are likely to be more effective if you first remove causes of dissatisfaction.

Remember that your team members might not want to discuss what is making them dissatisfied openly.

Tip 2:

Don't forget that each individual will have his or her own unique motivators. Address team-level motivators first, but then go on to discuss and plan for motivation at an individual level.

Key Points

People who do the same job or work in the same team are often motivated by similar things. By approaching motivation at team level, you can maximize the impact of your work on motivation.

Although many people understand how important it is to customize motivational strategies to fit a person's strengths and interests, you can also use the Team-Specific Motivation exercise to motivate your team.

Meet with your team and explain why it's important to find their top five motivators. Then, ask them to come up with what motivates them from their perspective, and from others' perspectives. Rate the team's top five motivators, tally the scores and then decide as a group how to deliver on those motivators.

Don't forget, though, that each individual will have his or her own motivators, so remember to address these. Set up an anonymous survey, or provide a suggestions box that people can use to submit their comments.