

Managers and Motivation

-- Marcia Hughes & James Terrell

Colorado's new Governor, John Hickenlooper, states that "moods are viral" and a good one "allows people to put down their defenses." He's right! Managers and supervisors have tremendous influence on the mood in the workplace. Here's a way to take your team's temperature. Count how many positive emotion words are used during a meeting, the day or the week. Also count how many negative emotion terms are used. If the proportion is not strongly positive, act! Everyone benefits when we all take responsibility for the emotional state of the environment, however managers and supervisors are inordinately influential on the mood and the motivation in the workplace. You just can't separate mood and motivation -- as goes the mood so goes the sense of well-being, engagement, and purpose. All that is packaged together as team motivation.

In recent social media discussions, we've seen many comments that managers don't or can't motivate team members. The gist of the argument seems to rely on a literal and limited sense of the word. To manage can mean to exercise control, to direct, even to manipulate. In the sense of the limited definition we agree that managers don't or can't motivate team members. But since when is a limited definition useful in meeting today's challenges? Managers have significant influence over the environment, the emotional state and perceptions of success and failure in the work environment. The comments, attitudes, expectations and other actions by a manager influence whether others on the team feel successful, productive and that their work, individually and as a team, makes a difference. To be a successful manager or supervisor we recommend you know you will influence motivation on a broad scale. Take these four steps to improve your success/ motivation and that of your team:

1. Take responsibility – yes you do influence how people who report to you work. You influence the environment and give them powerful messages about themselves and their capacity. You influence how hard they want to work, how capable they believe they are and how successful they feel.
2. Proactively influence the mood and emotional environment. As suggested above write down emotion words when you hear them and find out what proportion of the time a positive mood is invoked compared to when a negative mood is invited. Act to create the environment you want.
3. Focus on strengths and on what works. Call attention to success even when relatively small and do so as close to when it happens as possible. Don't wait six months until the next periodic performance review to say something, by then the benefit from your recognition is nearly lost.
4. Keep it simple, Smart Manager! Too many choices make decisions nearly impossible. It takes more time and wears us down. So look for the next meaningful step instead of a mega-solution. In *Switch* the authors, Heath and Heath, tell several stories to demonstrate the power of the small decision as compared to decision paralysis that is caused by too many choices or by trying to

solve too much at once. One of the best stories they highlight was finding out why some children were better nourished in poor villages even though the family economies were the same. The answer was simple, the mother cooked with the sweet potato greens while other mothers tossed the greens out. Learning the difference allowed villages to organize communal cooking events and to spread the habit of what works. This simple action positively improved the health of many village children. What small steps could strengthen your team?