

# A Message To Managers: Motivation Is Inside-Out, *Not* Outside-In<sup>1</sup>

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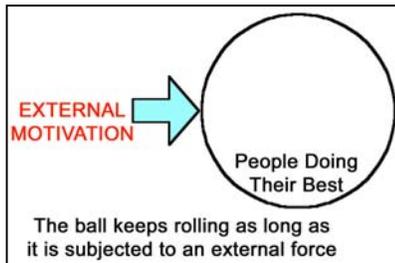
When managers talk about “motivating their people” they are really talking about getting people to behave in ways that lead to desired outcomes, such as an increase in sales, improved efficiency, higher levels of customer satisfaction, and so on. Typically, they use external motivators, such as monetary incentives or special prizes.

***The problem is that most managers are thinking about motivation in the wrong way.***

Managers who focus on external motivators are viewing motivation as having to put something *into* people that is not already there. They believe that without such input, people won’t perform at their best. True, monetary incentives do work in the short-run. But, research indicates that they don’t necessarily produce long-term changes in behavior.

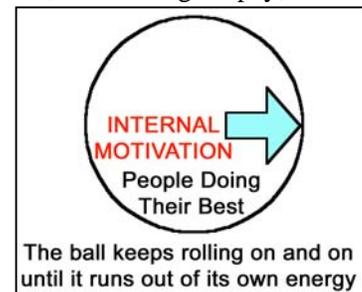
Managers need to view motivation in a different way. They need to tap into and stimulate the *internal* motivation of their people, instead of having to *externally* push them. This means that *their primary job is to create the conditions that will facilitate employees to be self-motivated.*

This viewpoint leads to a deeper, more individualized set of strategies, such as addressing the personal needs of employees, removing blocking elements in the work environment, building supporting relationships with people, etc.—strategies that influence a person’s *internal* motivation.



Look at it this way. The ball to the left represents people who are *externally* motivated. As long as external rewards are applied, such as higher pay, incentives, benefits, etc., the ball keeps rolling and rolling. But, take the rewards away and the ball will slow down and eventually stop!

On the other hand, consider the ball to the right, representing people who are *internally* motivated (self-motivated). Just like the well-



known “Energizer Bunny,” internal motivation (an internal commitment) keeps the ball rolling and rolling and rolling..... When people are *internally* motivated, their behavior is steady and predictable.

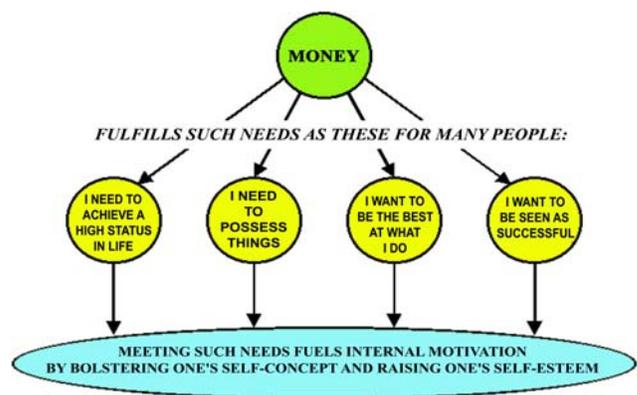
Does this mean we should not use external rewards to motivate people? Should we do away with all rewards—get rid of bonuses and incentive programs because they don’t produce (in fact, may diminish when stopped) *internal* motivation? No. Beginning with infancy, parenting in our culture teaches us to expect rewards. We grow into adulthood looking for rewards such as praise, recognition, status, money, and the like.

***The key to facilitating internal motivation is to link meaningful external rewards to a person’s needs.***

*Needs* are at the bottom of it all—things people want. Some people have a strong need to be approved by others. Others have a high need for status and prestige. Still others have a need to be perfect. And so on. And, it doesn’t matter where our needs came from. The fact is, once we have them, we drive ourselves to satisfy them. We all feel good when we satisfy them.

Consider how external motivators work. Take money, for example. Many people believe that money is a great motivator. This is especially true for people who work in sales. But when we look a little bit deeper, we find that money is simply a way for people to feed some of their *internal* needs. As illustrated in this diagram, money helps people feed a variety of personal needs. The question then is, “are there other ways to meet those needs besides monetary incentives?”

For example, *what other ways can we address a person’s need for status?* Awards. Ceremonies and other forms of public recognition.



<sup>1</sup> From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm> —Please take a moment to look at Arnie’s site: [www.arniedahlke.com](http://www.arniedahlke.com)

*What other things can we do to address a person's need for possessions?* Healthy employee discounts. Free financial counseling. Membership in low cost warehouses, such as Costco and Sam's Club.

*What other ways can we feed their need to be best at what they do?* Coach and mentor them. Special training or other educational opportunities. Provide them with the tools they need.

*What can we do to help them fulfill their need to be seen as successful?* Promotions. Representing the company at conferences and other meetings. Involving them in key decision meetings.

In other words, as these examples illustrate, counterbalance the external financial incentive with other strategies that tap into and stimulate a person's internal motivation. The more you meet the individual needs of your people, the more they will be internally motivated. They will be happier. They will perform better. They will end up staying longer. Money will be less important to them as an external motivator, because their internal needs are being fed in other ways. In fact, many employee surveys show that money is not usually at the top of the list of things that people mention when asked what they like about their jobs and their company.



Some years ago, I was working with a car salesman with a high status need. The Dealer rewarded his performance by providing him with a top-of-the line demo with a dealer plate. He felt closer to the Dealer and rode around town feeling like a king. And it worked out fine for the Dealer. He was able to write it off as a business expense.

Again, the more that personal needs of people are filled, the better they feel about themselves, the higher their self-esteem, the more positive they will see themselves, and, hence, the more they will be *internally* motivated. Thus, *to harness internal motivation, link external rewards to the internal needs of your employees.*

This means—before you can tap into the internal motivation of your people—that you as a manager must learn what needs they are driven to fulfill to feel better about themselves in order to identify the external rewards that will work best with them. Managers who view their job as coaching, supporting, and developing their people will easily become familiar with what their employees value and need.

There's another, very important step: *remove barriers that stand in the way of the desired behavior.* Ensure that your management style and your company systems and policies don't lead to actions that discourage the desired behaviors. Work with your people as a coach and facilitator, instead of as a "traffic cop" or taskmaster. As much as possible empower your people to make decisions instead of having to constantly check with you. Finally, ensure that your employees' work processes are designed to expedite desired behaviors rather than make it difficult for people to achieve them.

In other words, you as a manager must create an environment that will stimulate the desired behaviors and link external rewards to the internal dynamics of individual employees. They, after all, are the people ultimately responsible for the success or failure of your company.

Now that's the way to view motivation!

Summing it up, five steps are involved in harnessing the internal motivation of your people:

