

Motivation or Inspiration

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In a recent conversation a colleague discussed doing motivational speaking. Then she said, "or maybe it's inspirational." That got me thinking about a common dilemma that managers and leaders face, "is it my role to motivate or to inspire?" To me, the two terms are very related but have a definite distinction.

Motivation is something that comes from within. As a manager or leader, I don't believe I can motivate you to do something, especially something that you aren't interested in doing. Motivation is completely personal.

What I CAN do is to create an environment that fosters self-motivation, based on precisely what motivates you – whether that's money, responsibility, trust, empowerment, social meaning or something else.

And that's where inspiration comes into the picture, in creating that environment. Inspiration is an external factor. It's the spark that lights up an individual's motivators and sets them into action.

One of the most inspirational leaders of our time was Martin Luther King. His words and actions connected with people's internal motivators, specifically ethnic pride and social justice. He connected with people and inspired them with a vision of the future, and then showed them how they could be a part of making it a reality. Did he inspire everyone? No. There were many whose internal motivators didn't connect or align with his vision. There was probably nothing he could do to have them take action.

Think of some of the great energizing speakers or leaders that you've encountered. Did they inspire or motivate you?

One of our jobs as a leader is to create an environment that inspires individuals to connect their own inner motivators to a collective vision. Here's an example. A few years ago, I was coaching a banking executive, a regional sales leader. The collective vision of her group was to provide exceptional customer service while selling bank products and services to customers.

One of the financial specialists in her group was not meeting his goals. To motivate him, the executive kept explaining to the specialist that he was leaving money on the table, incentive money, when he failed to sell these services.

I asked the executive to tell me about the individual, and I quickly understood why this method wasn't working. She told me that the individual spent a lot of time volunteering in the community and enjoyed spending time with family and friends; he had been with the bank a long time and really loved to socialize with the individuals he worked with. I

explained to the executive that it didn't sound like money was a major incentive for this person and that it might be time to stop trying to motivate and start trying to inspire.

To inspire him, she needed to tap into this man's unique motivators, so I asked her to experiment by talking to the specialist about the future he was helping his customers create - the secure retirements, the college funds for their children and the first homes they were helping young couples purchase.

In a month, the specialist was meeting and in some cases exceeding goals. When the executive stopped trying to motivate with what SHE thought would work and what motivated her, and began trying to inspire the specialist and tap into their own motivators, they found a common ground. She created a vision and environment where the specialist could be self-motivated and thrive.

What motivates the people that you lead? How can you inspire them by sparking those motivators and linking them to the company's or your vision? Find these answers and you'll all succeed together.

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