

GETTING GOING

Part II

In Part I of “Getting Going,” we raised the question of whether the current paradigm for motivation that business takes for granted produces optimum results. That paradigm is based on “fixes” applied to those who aren’t motivated by those who are. It is founded on two ideas about people: (1) People will run faster and faster from something they fear, like foxes ahead of the hunters; (2) People will chase harder and harder after something they want, like racing greyhounds pursuing the mechanical rabbit. Fear and desire are the human qualities underlying this view. As we become more skilled and more sophisticated at motivation, we breed stronger, wiser hunters or we create more appealing and meaningful rabbits. But the fundamental notions are the same.

It is undeniable that fear and desire are powerful. It is undeniable that motivational techniques that draw on them are effective. For example, the prison system, based on fear, does generally motivate prisoners to do what officials want them to do. For example, the credit industry, based on desire, does generally motivate consumers to do what lenders want them to do. Relying on fear or desire does not sustain momentum, though. When it works, it’s hard work. The motivators must continually reinforce and re-engage others’ fear and desire and continually up the ante to recapture their attention. The motivators themselves are driven by fear that they will fail and desire to get more of what they want.

Does it ring true to our humanity that fear and desire are the deepest and most natural human feelings, the true origins of our motivation in life? Or are fear and desire ‘secondary’ feelings generated by people when their thinking becomes insecure, directed to their ideas and expectations about themselves or to what others think of them? Could we look beyond them to find a simpler, purer source of life energy?

Let’s look at this another way.

Let’s consider that a metaphor for motivational techniques as they are now practiced would be this: We are all traveling along an increasingly difficult highway, obstructed by stalled vehicles with dead batteries. The drivers whose vehicles have plenty of power are obliged to negotiate a path through stalled vehicles, to push or tow some of them along, or to drain their own energy jump-starting others. The powerful vehicles are always delayed on their journey and have to stop more often to get service themselves because of the wear and tear of salvaging others, but they have no choice in the matter because no one would make any progress at all if they didn’t do what it took to get at least some of the stalled vehicles moving again. Everyone is frustrated to one degree or another, but we’ve come to accept that this is the hard road of work.

Is it possible that this metaphor may be based on flawed observations and incomplete conclusions? Have we been so intent on finding the best ways to keep the moving drivers going and making sure they know how to get the stalled drivers going, that we missed something? When the journey started, everyone was moving. What happened? Could we find the way to recreate the original impetus for the journey, when people began moving forward together, all with momentum?

As long as we assume that the only reason people lack motivation is that they need things that must be provided to or for them, we are perpetuating the myths of power and the illusions of disempowerment. We are ignoring the human spirit. If we look into our own experience, we can see for ourselves a different and more hopeful paradigm that could obviate the exhaustion of the helpers and the distress of those receiving help.

Neither motivation nor lack of motivation is a permanent trait embossed for life into the mindsets of certain people. Both motivation and lack of motivation are experiences generated by states of mind common to all people, interchangeable and variable. At some times, even the most usually motivated people lack motivation and get stuck. At some times, even the least usually motivated people find motivation and get going. To return to the terminology in Part I – those who are “present at work but absent on duty” are having a particular experience of their own ways of holding and using their thought, and the answer to relief from that experience is within them, not in the strategic initiatives of their organizations. If they find that answer within themselves, everything their organizations offer them will be useful and appreciated. If they do not find that answer, nothing their organizations offer them will come clearly into focus through their internal fog.

When people are experiencing clarity and presence, they are intrinsically self-motivated. When people’s minds are racing and they are distracted, confused, upset, worried, anxious or distressed, they cannot stop chewing on their own thoughts long enough to pull themselves into the present and connect. Both states of mind are self-perpetuating. The results of presence are continually increasing enjoyment, involvement and interest in life and work, leading to better and more graceful performance. The results of “absence” are increasing frustration, disappointment and alienation, leading to more confusion and worry and poor performance.

People who are accustomed to presence and occasionally experience absence are grateful when the negative state passes. They do not make much of it. They would call it “a bad day” or “being out of sorts” or “losing it”. People who are accustomed to absence and occasionally experience presence are afraid when the positive state occurs because it is such a relief they want to hang onto it. Yet the very effort to hang onto it sucks them down into worry and concern about how long it can last and what to do to keep it. So they call it “a moment in time” or “a break from routine” or “a spot of luck”. In our usual way of thinking, exceptional states of mind at either end of the spectrum don’t last.

Our usual way of thinking, though, is to take our usual way of thinking for granted. We do not often stop to reflect on the possibilities inherent in the immediate shifts in reality that occur when our thinking changes, or how often our thinking does change. Thinking is so intrinsic that it is an unconsidered power, just like breathing. If we ever do stop to consider it, we realize that breathing is a crucial life activity and our very existence depends on continuously doing it. But we have no reason to stop to consider it unless something goes terribly wrong because it's natural. It's built into our life to breathe regularly. Thinking, also, is built into our life. Because we constantly create the form of our particular existence from the energy that is "aliveness", we can be certain our thinking will always deliver the ever-changing picture of our individual life to us. It usually is invisible to us that our life is coming from our thoughts, and our thoughts are passing through our minds. It wouldn't occur to us that we can "hold our thinking" just as we can hold our breath by deliberately obstructing the natural process. Nor would it occur to us that it's as tiring to keep holding our thinking in place as it is to keep holding our breath; our natural inclination is to let go and resume natural thinking/breathing.

What does this have to do with a new paradigm for motivation? The implications of an understanding of the way thought works are that (1) people are never more than one thought away from a whole new picture of their life; (2) when thought is operating naturally, no particular idea has power over us but unlimited ideas continually come and go; (3) people experiencing the natural, unimpeded movement of their thoughts are engaged in the present moment and accessing their full capacities as creative human beings. Their motivation is life itself; throwing themselves fully and fearlessly into what's happening.

What is new here is the realization that presence is the natural, innate state of mind for everyone. We create absence by impeding presence; we regain presence by leaving our thinking alone and letting it move naturally. Anything we do that re-engages fears and desires or keeps us focused on what's wrong with our thinking and how to correct it simply postpones the inevitable return to our natural state of mind.

Tension, discomfort, fear and insecurity are byproducts of thought, experiences we create through focus on certain thoughts. If our focus shifts from the words on the page of our thoughts to our natural ability to keep turning pages, the perceived power shifts from concern over how to react to the content of any of our thoughts to knowledge that we are meant to turn the pages and continually see new content of new thoughts. Some may be disturbing; some may be exhilarating – but none have staying power. The staying power is in the effortless movement in and out of various thoughts and changing states of mind because the nature of life is for the story to continue.

The most effective motivational "training" would be for all of us to see how our thinking works and how experience naturally changes as thinking naturally changes. Those who

are temporarily enclosed within a cell of thoughts that impede their progress and enjoyment would have the key to their own prison. Those who are temporarily soaring on a current of thoughts that send them surging ahead happily would have the wingspan to glide gracefully through the downdrafts. Everyone would share equally in the power of thought creating reality that ultimately defines motivation.

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