

The Motivation First Aid Kit

By Shelle Rose Charvet

During the economic downturn, the president of a company I worked with was about to send an e-mail to his sales force to demonstrate empathy for how difficult it had become to meet sales targets, saying that he would understand if they didn't make their numbers this quarter. What he didn't realize was how his sales people would interpret that message into their behavior. If he was so understanding, surely it would be okay if they didn't do that last appointment at five o'clock, because what difference would it make any way?

Fortunately, we managed to change his message before it went out. Instead he wrote:

"This quarter may be tougher to meet our sales quota, so I am asking you to work as hard as you possibly can. Please see as many customers as you can and do everything within your power so that we can ensure that we meet our targets. I know you can do this and we are counting on you. The sales managers will support you in this effort."

Times are hard. Companies have shed large numbers of their workforce, reducing their expenses in order to avoid bankruptcy. The employees who are left have much work to do replacing what their colleagues did, and yet they are still faced with the possibility of also losing their jobs. **Many people are depressed, suffering from feelings of hopelessness and are paralyzed at work.**

As a leader, everything you say or do can help your people get motivated to do their part or can sink them even lower into the hole.

What can a manager do to make sure their people get energized and ready to tackle the present situation? Unfortunately there isn't one solution that will work for all your employees. One size does not fit all when it comes to motivation. **Those actions that will motivate part of your workforce may not fit for many of your people.** And yet everyone could use some help right now.

Sure, you need to reorganize how work gets done with fewer people, and make sure they focus on the important tasks. But let's look at how you can help motivate your very different employees. I work with a psycholinguistic tool called the Language and Behavior Profile (LAB Profile)*.which **enables you to decode the individual motivation and thinking patterns of your team.** Here is a list of the different Motivation Triggers at work:

Motivation Triggers

Proactive and Reactive: Some people need to take initiative in order to be motivated while others can more to wait and reflect.

Toward and Away From: Some people need a goal in order to be motivated while others jump into action to prevent or solve a problem.

Internal and External: Some people prefer to judge for themselves while others are more influenced from outside people and factors.

Options and Procedures: Some people prefer to explore many alternatives while others are motivated to start and complete a single step-by-step process.

Sameness, Sameness with Exception, and Difference: Some people are motivated when their work is the same, some prefer gradual change, while others are motivated by constant radical shifts.

Criteria and Values: these are the things a person holds dear at work; what is important to them and triggers their motivation.

With all these different Motivation Triggers what is a manager or HR professional to do? It is not an easy task but here is a **step by step process** that can help you:

Motivating Your Team

First, make sure that **each employee has a clear set of responsibilities and tasks** to do. Secondly, **invite all of your team members for a meeting and set the framework** for what you expect from them and the **environment** you wish to create.

Here are the key messages they now need to hear from you and see reinforced by your actions:

1. As their leader you want to make sure that they know that **their contribution is needed now more than ever**, that you are here to help them reach their goals and overcome any obstacles they may encounter along the way.
2. There are many ways to look at the present situation, and one way is to **seek out and discover how we can find new opportunities and reduce unnecessary expenses**. All ideas are welcome.
3. It is also important to make sure we **complete and finish the important projects our internal and external clients need** from us **on time and on budget** to ensure we prove our usefulness.

4. Everything may feel different this year, and while there are huge changes in our environment, it is **still even more important to do our best work and to make sure our customers benefit from that.**

Thirdly, figure out the basic motivation needs of your team members so you can support them to perform at their best particularly under pressure. Here are the signs!

In a crisis here is how people with these different patterns react and what they need to perform better:

Proactive people who are motivated by taking initiative, and getting out and making things happen are really frustrated at the moment because it is difficult for them to see how to take the initiative. When these people are unable to take initiative they become de-motivated and depressed quite quickly. To get out of their negative space they need to proactively create a new reality for themselves. Here are some of the questions you can ask your Proactive employees to get them back in the game:

- What do you really want in your work?
- Why is that important to you?
- What are the steps you need to take right now to make this happen?
- What possible obstacles do you need to prevent now?
- What is the first step you can do today?

These questions are oriented towards action. A Proactive person needs to act now and have something specific to do. These questions allow that person to get into action immediately and start getting results.

But this will not work for someone who prefers to think things out slowly and carefully. **The Reactive employee** needs to thoroughly understand what they are going to do. Here are some questions you can ask a Reactive person to help them get out of their mental hibernation:

- What is important to you in your work?
- Why is that important?
- What steps will need to be in place to make this happen?
- What could be the obstacles for which you will need to have a solution?
- What do you think are the solutions to the obstacles?
- What is the first step that you can start today?

These questions allow the Reactive person to think their situation through. They need to spend some time creating a vision and a plan in their mind and working out the steps involved.

About 40% of the population are only motivated when they have a goal.

This is the **Toward pattern from the LAB Profile**. During tough times many Towards people panic because they see only the problems around them and they have *nothing to move towards*. This is disastrous for them unless they find a way to develop some goals to get them moving again. Here are some questions you can ask to help them get re-motivated and re-energized:

- What do you want in your work?
- What will that do for you?
- What are the steps you will need to take to achieve these goals?
- What are the obstacles for which you will need to find a solution to achieve these goals?
- What is the first step you can do today to move toward your goals?

If only 40% of the population are motivated to achieve goals, what is motivating the others? Another 40% of the population is motivated to act to prevent or avoid a problem from occurring or to solve one that is already happening. This motivation pattern is called *Away From* because these people are motivated to move away from the things they do not want. In an economic crisis there are many things they could move away from. The key is to focus on what could be the principal motivator for them. Here are some questions that they can answer to help find their way and not get lost:

- What do I most want to prevent from happening?
- What do I want instead?
- If I do not succeed in that, what will happen?
- What are the steps I need to take to move away from what I don't want and to achieve what I do want?
- What are the obstacles I will need to overcome?
- What can I start today so that I won't be stuck?

The last question in each set is critical because it helps *get the person moving* and back into action moving towards their goals (or away from their problem).

These are **four of the Motivation Triggers from the LAB Profile**. As a leader or HR professional, you can see that it is important to **ask these questions in a way that engages each person's own individual motivation rather than offering the "one size fits all" solution**. While this is not the miracle cure, when you ask the right questions, you can **focus your employee's attention on what they can do to get out of mental hibernation and into high performance mode**.

*from *Words That Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence*, 2nd edition, by Shelle Rose Charvet, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, IA