FAQ: Employee Motivation, Smart Goals

**Question 1:** It is difficult to motivate people in times of uncertainty and economic hardship. What can I do as a manager?

**Answer 1:**

- **Read how the experts motivate:** Don't rely only on your own instincts or knowledge of motivation. Read books that tell how the best leaders motivate and learn classic theories of motivation.
- **Consider and apply what motivates you:** Though people differ, chances are that what makes you want to work well for your employer will also be a part of what inspires your employees.
- **Get to know your people and what they need:** Ask those who report to you, through both direct and indirect means, what motivates them in work. Focus on supplying these motivators to them.
- **Look for opportunities to acknowledge:** On a daily basis, look to catch others exceeding your expectations and acknowledge them with specific praise when they do.
- **Remove frustrations:** What frustrates those you manage? Do everything in your power to remove hindrances whether physical arrangement of the setting, policies that don't make sense, or lack of opportunity or training. Consider yourself empowered to create an atmosphere that allows your employees to flourish and get work accomplished.
- **Support:** Let your employees know by your actions that you are their greatest ally, and desire for them to reach their full potential.
- **Don’t overestimate monetary incentive:** Money does not motivate as much as people think it does. While fair compensation is important, fringe benefits are low on the list of what maximizes employee loyalty and potential.

**Question 2:** How can you use training and development at each stage of an employee's career?

**Answer 2:** Learning, growth, and development never stop; they help employees improve performance, manage their career, and stay motivated. Here are career stages and suggested training and development activities (DeSimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002):

- **Preparation for work (0–25):** Providing potential employees with training and development opportunities helps them prepare for their careers and could potentially lessen their learning curve once they come to work for you full-time. This is why many companies offer internships.
to college students; it benefits both parties.

- **Organizational entry (18–25):** Many new career entrants lack knowledge of how to operate in a business environment. Training and development at this stage should focus not only on job skills but also on business skills. Mentoring can be very effective in acculturating younger employees and motivating them, as can cohort relationships with other career starters.

- **The early career (25–40):** This is a time of investment in a company by employees, including acquisition of both skills and job experience and assimilation into the culture. Job-specific training, as well as the opportunity to be reimbursed for outside education (graduate degree, certification), sends the employee the message that the company values them and is investing in them.

- **The midcareer (40–55):** By now, employees are well-established in their job and company (or at least have learned how to assimilate rapidly). They may be advancing into senior management, plateauing in their current position, or finding that their role/responsibilities/skills are obsolescent. To keep these employees motivated, consider offering them opportunities to learn new skills, explore new roles, experience higher-level interpersonal or management learning, or turn the tables and mentor and train others. The opportunity to be the subject matter expert or teacher can be a powerful motivator and rejuvenator.

- **Late career (55–retirement):** The challenge here is to remind employees that they are still relevant and valued. Knowledge transfer is also key for the company. Mentoring, teaching, and providing subject matter expertise are motivating. Many companies also provide retirement training for their senior workers to help prepare them for the non-corporate phase of their lives.

**Question 3:** What are SMART objectives? How do I use them in an employee development plan?

**Answer 3:**

SMART objectives can make an employee development plan more relevant, motivating, and attainable.

- **Specific:** Objectives should be as specific as possible, using action verbs. For example, "I will increase sales for current customers. . . ."

- **Measurable:** Objectives should be able to be measured. Continuing the example, ", . . .by 50% . . . ."

- **Achievable:** Objectives should be realistic and attainable, given ability and time. Set the bar high, but not too high—is a 50% sales increase
FAQ: Employee Motivation, Smart Goals

realistic?

- **Relevant**: Objectives should fit into the employee's role and responsibilities. This example would be relevant for a salesperson but probably not for technical support.
- **Time-bound**: Objectives should include an expected time for achievement. To finish the example, "Within the next 12 months, I will increase sales for current customers by 50%"

If you know your objectives, then you can plan employee development to address needed skills, timing, and method.

**Question 4**: What are some nonmonetary motivators?

**Answer 4**: Nonmonetary motivators can be designed to address people's social, esteem, and self-actualization needs (learn more about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs by reading the article for this phase). Here are some ideas:

- **Status-type motivators**: employee-of-the-month awards, recognition as an expert or top performer, favored workspace, promotion (without increase in compensation), and recognition events
- **Fringe benefits**: additional paid leave time (may cross the monetary boundary), free food, transportation service for people working longer hours, liberal sick day policy (that is, the allowance to care for sick relatives), concierge service
- **Personal fulfillment**: personal recognition from senior management, professional coaching, recognition as an expert, invitation to mentor a newer employee, linkage of personal performance to company results, trust from managers (in other words, manage one's own time)

**Question 5**: I am an employee, must I prepare for my development planning session, or do I just listen to what my boss tells me to do?

**Answer 5**: To get the most out of your planning session, you need to do some thinking and some homework. It is your career, after all, not your boss's. Consider the following:

- Where are you now in your career, and where do you want to go? Are you still in growth mode? Are you comfortable with your role? Are you an expert in your role, or do you want to change roles? This will set your plan's direction and focus.
- How do your skills and knowledge compare with those of your peers and managers? Look at not just technical skills but also interpersonal skills.
FAQ: Employee Motivation, Smart Goals

For example, are you a proficient programmer who has trouble communicating with users? You may consider including listening skill training in this year's plan, and slow the pace at which you are studying for the latest certification.

- How do you learn best? Are you a reader, listener, or doer? If you fall asleep in workshops, then perhaps the online version of Intermediate PowerPoint would be best.
- How much time can you spend on development? What options do you have? Think about your workload, the company attitude towards training, and your manager's attitude. Then research and find training that will most likely fit your company budget and your time constraints. For example, if you do not have access to a computer with Internet, but have a flexible schedule, then a workshop would be more practical than Web-based training.

Reference