

Motivating Managerial Self-Development

An Action Plan for Objectives and Performance

EDWIN TIMBERS

It is often said of a manager that he does or does not "develop his people." This expression, perhaps subconsciously, reveals a basic misconception in management thinking, for managers are not developed by others. They develop themselves.

To develop, a manager must want to develop enough to make the necessary effort to do so. He must be motivated. Without motivation, little development occurs. A second factor essential to development, of course, is the individual's capacity to develop in those areas where he seeks it.

The Uncommon, Inner-Directed Man

Motivation can be internal, external, or a combination of these. Some individuals need no external incentives, because they are strongly "inner di-

rected," as David Riesman described them in "The Lonely Crowd."¹ American history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is studded with self-made men, with Horatio Algers, whose drive, determination, and will to succeed—when supplemented by native ability, character, and stamina—enabled them to overcome every obstacle. Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Johnson were such men. So were Henry Ford, Walter Chrysler, and Andrew Carnegie. And so are such people as Glenn Cunningham, Wilma Rudolph, and Ben Hogan, whose will power made them champions after their doctors had written them off.

Most people, however, are not so strongly inner-directed as these. Most of us benefit from some external inducements to stiffen our spines and bolster our flagging spirits. Yet, the fact that

DR. EDWIN TIMBERS obtained his A.B. in Economics from West Virginia University in 1944 and his A.M. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Michigan in 1951 and 1954. He has been Assistant Professor of History and Government at The St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York; Field Representative, Opinion Research Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey; Senior Training Supervisor, The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio; Management Development Administrator, Kaiser Steel Corporation, Oakland, California; and is now Associate Professor of Business, University of Santa Clara, California.

1. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, pp. 29-32.

most do require external motivation does not mean that they are not self-made. Every career is self-made for better or for worse, and whether the individual is inner- or outer-directed is immaterial. We have been confused by the too narrow application of the term "self-made" to the successful, inner-directed individual who has risen from humble origins, whereas it can be applied with equal appropriateness to the derelict. He, too, is self-made.

America's Contemporary Other-Directed Ethos

This article is not concerned with the superior, inner-directed person of high ambition, for he will do his best regardless of external stimuli. The natural scarcity of such persons, moreover, is compounded by the antipathy of our contemporary, other-directed ethos to the development of strong, inner-directed personalities. In middle-class, consumer-oriented America, we are preponderantly other-directed. We prefer to take our cues from our influence centers—our superiors, clubs, social groups, and favorite columnists and commentators. In seeking social acceptance, we endeavor to reflect the norms and mores of our associates and remain well within the behavioral perimeters established by our reference groups.

Despite the numerous attacks on conformity in recent years, it undeniably has great social utility. It fosters social harmony and cooperation, stabilizes and makes a predictable human behavior, improves communication, and promotes friendship. But it must not be overlooked that in the process of securing these benefits we have lost much of our forefathers' self-reliance and rugged in-

dividualism, a result of our departure from the Protestant Ethic, the growth of public and private paternalism, and increasing individual interdependence stemming from technological specialization. As self-sufficiency decreases, interdependence increases.

What is the Implication of Other-Direction for Management

The implication of this thesis for management is that people today are increasingly in need of external motivational stimuli. They must be induced, somehow, to strive to improve their job performance. How can managers, the most important group of people in our society, induce their subordinates to develop themselves?

In the most general sense, there are two types of external inducements—negative and positive. Negative inducement has been applied throughout human history. The Egyptians used it to build the Pyramids. The Greeks and Romans used it to propel their galleys and build their temples. The essence of such inducement is fear. The second type of inducement, desire or positive attraction, replaced fear as the primary motivator in America when there was finally instituted a separation of economic power and a system of checks and balances between management and labor somewhat comparable to our long-established separation and balancing of governmental power.

The Transition to Positive Motivation

In 1935, when our government, by the Wagner Act, gave federal protection

to the attempts of unions to organize workers and bargain collectively relative to the terms and conditions of employment, it created an economic force of such potency that by 1947 the previous imbalance in the distribution of economic power favoring management had reversed itself in favor of labor.

Once management's monopoly of the power of economic coercion was broken and this power shared with organized labor, management discovered that the negative inducement of fear had been largely neutralized. Management was left no choice but to motivate by positive attraction. Fortunately, the pioneering efforts of Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger in the field of human relations had given management a solid foundation on which to make the transition in leadership philosophy and method, and, by 1955, the majority of managers who deemed themselves to be enlightened, modern, and progressive were paying lip service to, and often sincerely practicing, what they believed to be good human relations.

Achieving the Golden Mean Through Synthesis

While gentle persuasion, permissiveness, and emotional inhibition were occasionally carried to extremes by those to whom these arts were new and little understood, only a few have seriously advocated a return to the "bull-of-the-woods" and the "public-be-damned" philosophy which had once characterized employee and public relations. In recent years, fortunately, there has been a decided swing of the pendulum back to the golden mean of human relations, which borrows some firmness from the last, inner-directed century and melds it

with the empathy of the present. Such a synthesis, which avoids the extremes of tyranny and abdication, seems to be the path of wisdom.

There is another practical reason why the present eclectic approach surpasses fear as a motivator—fear generates hostility. While action under duress may accomplish objective, external goals, seldom can the subjective, internal end of self-development be fully attained under the pressure of fear. Obviously, the better course is to establish positive external inducements which motivate the employee to seek his most complete fulfillment as an employee and, most importantly, as a human being. How can this be done?

Motivation by Objectives

In the writer's opinion, the following approach, often referred to as "management by objectives" and "planned performance" and successfully applied by a growing number of prominent concerns, has great promise. Before such a program can successfully be established, however, top management must resolve to create and preserve maximum opportunity, both within and without the organization, for each manager and manager candidate to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, habits, and skills he needs to perform most effectively in his present position and other positions for which he appears to have potential. Second, top management's seriousness in fostering employee self-development must be communicated by its deeds as well as words throughout the organization. Third, an action program to translate the ideal into profitable reality must be established.

An Action Program

A program incorporating the following steps should provide an environment conducive to managerial self-development and substantially enhance the efficiency of the entire organization:

1. Beginning at the top and proceeding downward echelon by echelon, managers at each level of the organization establish individual and group objectives and standards of performance in collaboration with the next higher level. Performance standards should be qualitative and/or quantitative according to the nature of the job to which they refer; they should be significant, realistic, concrete, and, if possible, measurable; and they should establish levels of performance which, once achieved, should lead to the satisfactory attainment of the objective to which they relate.
2. A management inventory is taken to ascertain what additional knowledge, attitudes, habits, and skills each manager needs to achieve excellence in the performance of his present job objectives and what he will need to achieve satisfactory or better performance in the next position which he may reasonably be expected to hold.
3. An individual development plan is prepared by each manager and his immediate superior to reduce the gap between present and desired performance. Such plans, depending upon the circumstances of the case, might include any or a combination of the following: job rotation, special assignments, "assistant to" responsibilities, guided reading, plant visita-



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tions, active participation in professional organizations, committee assignments, assignment to a junior board of directors, night or correspondence school, attendance at a university management-development program, more coaching and/or counseling by his immediate superior, greater participation in decision making, and heavier delegation of authority and responsibility.

4. Each manager and his superior revise objectives and performance standards whenever conditions warrant and periodically evaluate progress toward objectives.

The Virtues of Objectives and Standards

Motivating managerial self-development by setting objectives and formulating standards of performance has several distinct virtues:

1. The objectives and standards established are generally challenging but attainable, realistic, and flexible, adapting to the situation as it changes.
2. The joint formulation of objectives by two levels of management integrates the objectives of each level with those of the next higher level and eliminates conflicting objectives within any level.

3. Because each manager plays the major role in setting his own objectives and performance standards, he feels a deep personal commitment to achieve and, if possible, to surpass them.
4. Since the objectives and standards so formulated are significant, realistic, concrete, measurable, and, above all, acceptable to the manager who developed them, they constitute an ideal yardstick with which to measure his job performance.
5. Since management by objectives leads to the integration of individual and group objectives at each level with those of all higher levels, the entire organization can advance with optimum efficiency toward its goals, because its managers, on whom its impetus primarily depends, will be strongly motivated, both individually and collectively, to maximize its thrust.

In conclusion, whether and how managers are motivated to develop and apply their abilities is the variable principally responsible for the success or failure of any organization. Desire is generally conceded to be more effective than fear as a means of motivating people to seek personal growth, and management by self-determined objectives and standards of performance is the best method yet developed to instill such desire.

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