

A No-Cost, All Encompassing Approach to Motivating Your People

In the face of the pandemic, thousands of long term care employees have demonstrated an unprecedented level of care and commitment to their residents, their families and to each other. This shared common enemy served as a powerful focal point for people at all levels in organizations to come together to fight, at times to grieve, and in the end, to celebrate shared wins.

For the most part, employee motivation was not an issue. The severity of the pandemic (the potential loss of life and livelihood) provided all the motivation people needed to stay focused, to get the job done right, and well.

For leaders, two important lessons must be gleaned from this experience:

- 1) Your people CARE!
- 2) Your people HAVE motivation!

Moving Into The Post-Covid-19 Period

So now what? As the severity of the pandemic is reduced, what is happening to the motivation levels of your employees? With the neutralizing or corralling of the common enemy, you may experience a drop in employee morale to pre-pandemic levels, or even see them plummet further. Exhaustion, and dealing with ongoing controls and expanded work demands, may undermine peoples' motivation to push on through to the end, as the wait for the "good old days" seems indeterminable. Motivation may become a challenge for many people.

For leaders looking to shepherd their Homes into a post-pandemic period of positivity, it is more imperative than ever to focus on employee motivation. Good leaders know that their success is measured by how well their people do their jobs, and when motivation wanes, everyone suffers.

The good news is that even after all you have gone through, you can create a culture in your Home comprised of highly motivated employees - without spending all of your fiscal resources. In fact, all of the strategies shared here are no-cost approaches to promoting highly motivated staff.

This article focuses first on the two major myths regarding human motivation, and then examines a three-step process to accelerating employee motivation.

Debunking the Two BIG Motivation Myths

- Myth #1

And the first big motivation myth is... \$\$\$\$\$. Just as the Beatles declared years ago (Can't Buy Me Love), money will not buy motivation. Paying people more money does not result in more motivated employees demonstrating improved productivity or heightened morale.

In some jurisdictions we have seen attempts to positively impact the workplace by paying a pandemic bonus to front line nursing staff. Not only did this demoralize all other employees who were going above and beyond and received nothing extra, it did not address the core issue – the lack of staff to deal with added care responsibilities.

While these front line care staff may have felt somewhat vindicated with the added bonus, based on Silver Meridian informal research with leaders and employees, front line care staff would have appreciated more “hands on deck” to help with the work, rather than a bonus to do the impossible. And of course, since everyone was working to capacity before the bonus, increasing wages did not relieve the pressure or result in the provision of more and better care.

There is one caveat to the money and motivation issue. If people are underpaid (i.e., they are paid less than others in comparable positions of responsibility and scope), then the lack of reimbursement is usually a de-motivator, impacting productivity and morale in a negative manner (such as the non-payment of a pandemic bonus to people other than front line care staff!).

- Myth #2

And for the second big myth... it is your job as a leader to motivate your people. Balderdash! Not true! Absolute rubbish! A complete misrepresentation of your role as a leader! In fact, you have the responsibility of motivating only one person... YOU! That's it!

Now do you feel a little more relieved? One less task on your plate!

And who is responsible for motivating your people? They are! The reality is that human motivation comes from within. Your people are just like you – they do what they do because there is something in it for them, something that they want that inspires them to be motivated. We know the expression “You can lead the horse to water, but you can't make him drink” – unless he wants to drink. What would prompt him to drink? If he is thirsty, then he drinks.

The role of leaders is to respond to the “thirst” that resides in every person – the thirst or desire to have something, do something, be something - anything that inspires them to be motivated. People are motivated to change when they see a benefit for them.

This leads to the universal truth...

Your role as a leader is not to motivate others, but to motivate yourself to become an “inspiring” leader; one who focuses on what matters, and will be of benefit, to others, and thereby increase their desire to be motivated to change.

Three-step Process to Fostering Employee Motivation

So now that we have these two myths out of the way, we can focus on how leaders can INSPIRE others, and thereby increase the likelihood that they will be motivated to change.

We call this approach Inspired Leadership, recognizing that truly great leaders know that to elicit change in others, they must find ways to inspire them to want to change. And by change, we are referring to any action or response that represents something different than what is currently happening. So, whether you are looking for someone to do something different as a result of a change in a procedure, changing the way an individual deals with others (or with you, the leader), or any other form of change, the key is to inspire the other(s) to want to change because they see a benefit for them.

So here are the three steps to fostering employee motivation:

- 1) Step One: Look Inside You
- 2) Step Two: Monitor What You Do
- 3) Step Three: Respond to What They Do

The first two steps are about what you need to reflect on within yourself, in order to become a leader who inspires others to be motivated. The third step focuses on specific actions you can take with others – actions that connect how you project yourself, to what people see as benefits that inspire them to be motivated.

1) Step One: Look Inside You

During stressful and uncertain times such as we are experiencing, and continue to experience, it's normal to feel anxious, frustrated, overwhelmed, and even scared. Chances are, most people around you have been experiencing similar emotional responses. Ignoring such feelings can result in seemingly unrelated sporadic outbursts (one of those “where did that come from?” reactions), and at the very least, subtle telling signs of frustration or fear (involuntary physical responses, such as sighs, eye rolling and look-aways).

When experiencing such stress, it's easy to infect each other with anxiety and fear. As a leader, it is imperative that you not only confront such feelings, but take the lead, and consciously commit to countering them with more positive responses within yourself.

The first step to countering such feelings, so you will act in ways that inspire others, is to look inside yourself, and search for what is most important to you. By focusing on your positive hopes and aspirations, it allows you to reframe your thoughts and perceptions of what is going on around you.

Here are some fundamental questions to reflect on in this personal internal journey (we will explain the numbers shortly!):

- What do I most value? (3)
- What inspires me, gets me excited; what do I want to do more of? (2)
- What turns me off? (3)
- How do I want to be seen as a leader? (1)
- Where do I want to be in my life within the next 3-5 years? (2)

Your responses to such questions will point you to what inspires and motivates you.

From this reflection point, take a few minutes to relate your responses to the following: your Home's (1) Mission; (2) Vision; and (3) Values. Using the numbers (1, 2, & 3), match your responses to your Home's corresponding Mission, Vision or Value number. While your personal Mission, Vision and Values may not be identical to that of your Home, you are looking for congruence. As long as they are not in opposition to each other, then you know you are personally working in the right place.

Taking this deep dive into your own personal points of inspiration, to see what motivates you, is essential. Before you can take Step Two in this motivational process, you really do have to examine what is most important to you.

2) Step Two: Monitor What You Do

While Step One helped you focus on what inspires you, Step Two is about paying attention to these personal points of inspiration!

We are reminded of the story (attributed to the Cherokee) of the talk between an elder and a young child. The Cherokee elder told his grandson about the battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between the two 'wolves' that live inside us all. One is Unhappiness. It is fear, worry, anger, jealousy, sorrow, self-pity, resentment, and inferiority. The other is Happiness. It is joy, love, hope, serenity, kindness, generosity, truth, and compassion." When the child asked "Which one wins?", the elder responded, "The one you feed."

While staying in this more positive state of "happiness" is a challenge during such times of high demand and stress, we can take steps to protect ourselves from these emotional contagions by feeding the positive wolf within.

For example, monitor and reduce how often you engage in venues where fear feeds on itself, such as social media, cable news, and frenzied conversations with friends and coworkers. Verify resources, distinguishing between people who are speculating, and those who have sound information.

Also, take care of your mental health. Commit to exercising, practicing mindfulness and meditation, volunteering, and seeking out positive, high-quality connections with others —

even if they're virtual. Simple wellness practices like these will help you build resilience and positivity, which will influence how others perceive you.

3) Step Three: Respond to What They Do

Now that you are clearly focused on what inspires you, and are committed to feeding your inner happy, positive wolf, your actions and interactions with others will be more inspiring to those you work with and lead every day.

Keep in mind that the following strategies and approaches are not sequential, and are often successfully employed through a “blend” of interactions.

Lead with Optimism: Even in dire circumstances, you can still lead with optimism, helping your team stay resilient amidst uncertainty. First, be a role model. Lip service alone won't work. Also, keep in mind that a positive outlook is easier to adopt as a group, so help employees foster a sense of connection with each other.

This can be as simple as:

- Celebrating when a team or department hits a milestone
- Starting meetings with each person saying one thing they're grateful for
- Review progress – Flip chart and post accomplishments from Day 1 to now
- Create an “Appreciation Wall” for everyone to post messages of encouragement
- Share and celebrate good news stories – both internal and external

As a leader, you have an opportunity to set the conditions for a collective positive outlook on your team. Take advantage of it.

MBWTA – Managing By Walking and Talking Around: Ideally, make it your mission to get out of your office and connect with people at least twice, every day. Even at the best of times it can be a challenge to get out from underneath the pile of tasks you face. But just as you abhor task-oriented care of your residents, you too need to re-frame your focus on the bigger picture of what is most important, and connect with people. Otherwise, you performing as a task-oriented manager – not a leader.

A side bonus – You are more likely to sense when something is “off” when you are circulating, and by dealing with issues in the moment, when they are minor concerns, you save time and aggravation of having to deal with it later when it comes through your door as a major issue.

Catch People...Doing Things Right (CPDTR): Yes, we know you do this now, but do you do it well, and enough? We often ask people in training sessions to put up their hand if they are tired of being told they are doing a good job. The reality is everyone loves to be recognized as a valued, respected member of the care team, and acknowledging what is valued inspires people to do it even more. The practise of praising more is one of the most impactful behaviours a leader can have to positively inspire others.

Here are four simple suggestions that make for better, more impactful, praisings:

- Praise specific behaviours – focus on what the person did or said - avoid generalizations.

- Link the praise to your Home's values.
- Praise immediately – don't wait for their PA session!
- Praise "routine" actions – good care in LTC is not about episodes of high drama, but rather, it is about doing the small, caring things in residents' lives that are meaningful to them.

Ask Questions - Listen More – Talk Less: People feel inspired and motivated when they feel valued and respected for their contributions. Asking people how they are doing, or asking for suggestions, are only effective if you listen and show an interest in what they say. By asking questions, you are encouraging people to become a part of the solution, and contributing to the solution is an empowering, inspiring place for most people to be!

Boost Morale with a Thank You: Closely aligned to CPDTR, don't underestimate the power of symbolic awards, such as private thank-you note. To maximize their effect, it's essential to customize these rewards to each unique context. Ask yourself: Are you the best messenger, or would this expression of gratitude be more impactful coming from someone else? When is the best time to offer the message? And should it be communicated privately or publicly? Whatever you decide, your message can be short and sweet — as long as it's thoughtful. When employees feel that it's sincere, a symbolic gesture of recognition can go a long way.

Enter Into THEIR Homes: Take your expressions of gratitude and praise to an even higher level by sending them home – to the employee's home. Sending a personalized note of acknowledgement, or a birthday card with a personal message, to where the employee lives is a powerful way for you to share your praise, and for the person to be seen as special by the people that mean the most to them. Handwriting the message (and the outside name and address), is the finishing touch to the personalization of your message!

Our Home's Vision: An ideal Home Vision is not about what your Home is, but what is a realistic goal of how your Home aspires to be seen in the future. By reinforcing this Vision, by bringing it to life in your daily practice, it can serve as an inspirational rallying cry for everyone. When you incorporate your Home's Vision into your discussion every day, you hear yourself saying things like "How will this help move us forward with our Vision to being recognized as...?", or "Wow, that brings us one step closer to realizing our Vision of...". Such acknowledgements reinforce where the Home is headed, and represents an opportunity to inspire people, as they realize they are helping as you move forward together.

Help Your Team Make It Over the Finish Line: Pandemic fatigue. Mental fog. Work/life blur. Whatever you want to call it, you and your people may be going through some version of it right now.

As a leader, it is imperative that you help focus everyone on what's important over the long term, not just what is urgent right now. That short-sightedness can set the team up for failure when the crisis is over. This ties into the focus on the Home's Vision, noted above. The Vision helps people see beyond the immediate obstacles, and towards a longer term goal.

Make room for foolishness: While dealing with essential work responsibilities must be done, occasionally making time for fun and levity is also important. Declaring a time for some spontaneous fun and laughter, such as a “Foolish Four” minutes of making faces at each other, or sharing your most embarrassing teenager moment, can help to alleviate the strains of the day. It is helpful to declare the time (duration) up front, to encourage people to not get carried away for too long of a period. Try to make the activity a “leveler” - something that everyone can do, regardless of education or position in the Home. And perhaps most important, make sure you, the leader, take part in the foolishness!

Summary

Good leaders recognize that their role is to inspire others, such that they are motivated to excel. Motivating others to change is not something you can buy or demand as a leader. Rather, it is about what you as a leader believe, what you project, and what you do to inspire others, such that they want to change.

This is not about spending money to motivate people.
This is about being an Inspiring Leader.

About the Author

Ron Martyn is the Co-Owner of Silver Meridian. For over 20 years, Silver Meridian has helped LTC managers hone their leadership skills, by empowering and energizing people, and becoming recognized as Inspired Leaders in the provision of care (English only). Go to Silver Meridian (<https://silvermeridian.com>) for more details. For information on the new Winter intake for the, Online DOC/ADOC Leadership Certificate Program (Accredited), click the following link: https://silvermeridian.com/employee_focus/the-doc-adoc-leadership-certificate-program/