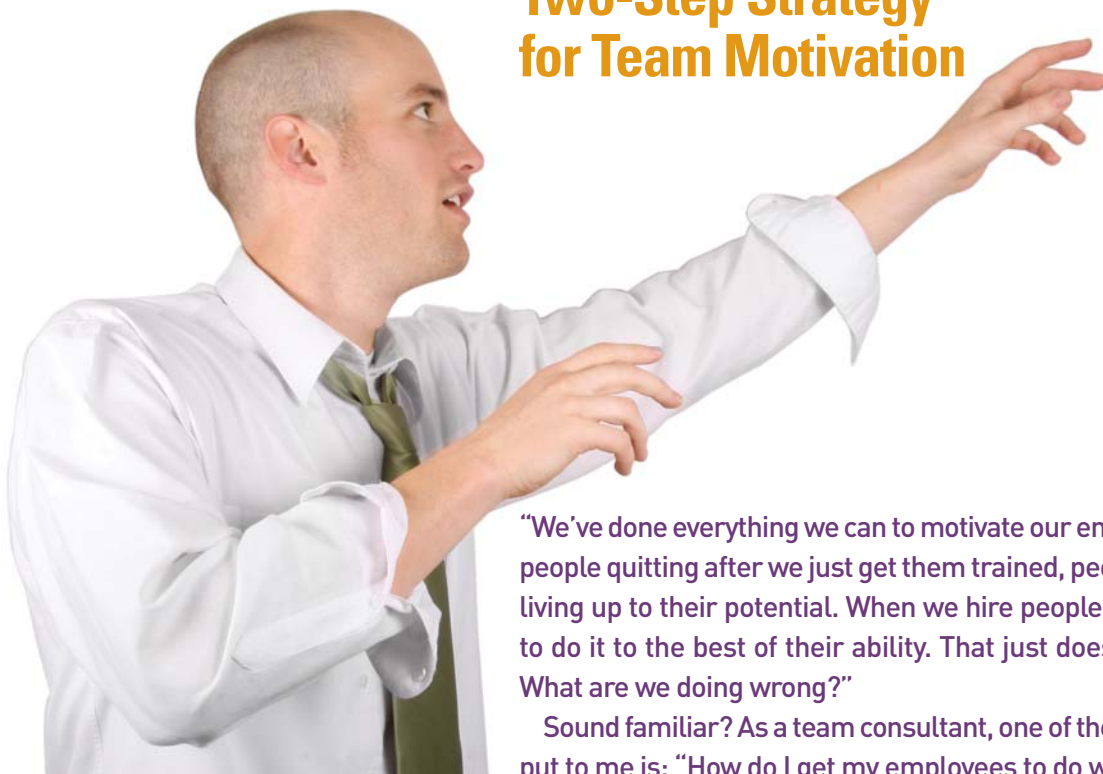


By Kathleen Ruby, PhD

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What Employees Want

Two-Step Strategy for Team Motivation

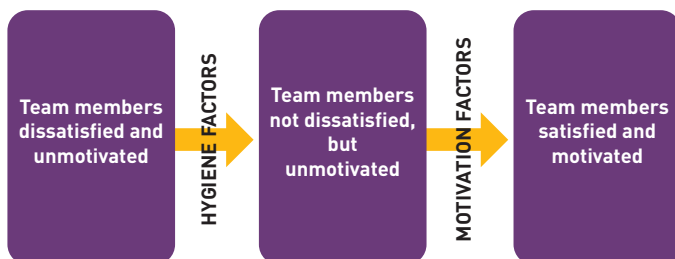


“We’ve done everything we can to motivate our employees, and we still have people quitting after we just get them trained, people calling in sick and not living up to their potential. When we hire people to do a job, I expect them to do it to the best of their ability. That just doesn’t happen around here. What are we doing wrong?”

Sound familiar? As a team consultant, one of the most common questions put to me is: “How do I get my employees to do what I want them to do?”

Management guru Frederick Herzberg’s 1950s landmark study on motivating employees¹ remains valid today. Simply put, he said leaders must realize that two factors are involved in team satisfaction and motivation:

Two-Factor Theory of Motivation



1. People do not respond well to pain.
2. More than the absence of pain is required to create a motivated team.

Now, pain in the workplace can arise from many factors, including lack of job security, low status, inferior working conditions, negative work relationships, and unsatisfactory company policies or administration. These are what Herzberg terms “hygiene” factors, which can demoralize a work force and cause dissatisfaction. They are the main cause of grumbling and office despair, but their absence alone does not result in a motivational gain. For example, new policies or employees, a leadership retreat, or even across-the-board salary increases may induce

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a temporary euphoria, but the team quickly returns to baseline behaviors.

During a recent consultation, a practice manager said to me, “I just don’t get it. My team complained for years about our inefficient clinic space and the lack of natural light in here. So we went way out on a limb and built the new clinic. But people still grumble and complain! I lost two techs and a receptionist after we moved into the new building. No one seems any more eager to work now than they did before.”

This manager’s realization underscores Herzberg’s findings. The factors that motivate employees are distinct from those that cause dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Inborn Need to Grow and Thrive

Herzberg discovered that, in addition to the need to avoid pain, humans also need to grow as people. The distinguishing feature of these “motivational factors”—eg, recognition, interesting work, responsibility, and advancement—is that employees achieve them *through the way they work*, rather than through environmental factors that are available to everyone.

For employees to remain satisfied and committed to their work, they have to sense that their work both means something and is recognized and appreciated.

More Than Money

Salary, and fair wages, certainly impact the way employees perceive the job environment (ie, “I am paid enough that it is worth my time to work here.”) and also serve as a reward for excellent work (ie, “Wow, the practice really values my contribution to our team effort; I got a big raise this year.”). Money alone, however, does not motivate most people for the long term.

Herzberg recommends that team leaders look to “job enrichment” as the best way to increase job satisfaction and motivate veterinary team members to

Put Principles Into Practice

Work Hygiene

Although hygiene factors alone won’t solve a work place’s problems, if left untended they contribute to low morale and feelings of dissatisfaction. Ask your team to help you identify and tackle your most distracting issues.

1. As a practice, have the team members independently identify and list what is causing dissatisfaction. These hygiene factors might include things like a dingy clinic space, lack of employee parking, or poor communication between the front and the back staff. Compile a list and bring it to the next staff meeting.
2. Brainstorm about how to correct these issues and develop a priority list for tackling them. Now is the time to encourage creativity and “big ideas”; address the realities of money or space availability later. This encourages employees to think outside the box to solve practice problems.
3. Once practice hygiene factors are prioritized and budgeted, ask team members to volunteer to see them through. Recognize and celebrate each task completion at staff meetings.

Work Enrichment Factors

Employees want their individual contributions and talents to be recognized and valued and there is room for professional growth. They long to know that their presence on the team both makes a difference and paves the way for future personal development.

1. Ask each team member to write down the unique factors and talents they bring to the practice. Next, ask how they think their gifts might be even better utilized to make the practice “exceptional.”
2. Discuss each idea with individual employees. Together, develop an action plan to explore new ways of doing their jobs, obtaining additional training, or teaching others.
3. Institute an innovation of the month award to recognize individual achievements. Figure out how employees would like to be rewarded and recognized for these achievements. How? Ask them!
4. Make sure these action plans and resulting achievements are recognized and discussed at individual evaluation time. Let people know their efforts are appreciated.
5. Make use of the knowledge gained about each individual in making staffing decisions, promotions, or changes in job responsibilities. Make it clear that contributions and actions matter in such decisions.
6. Ensure that a self-development action plan is cultivated and updated annually for each employee.

excel. Jobs are enriched when individuals feel their ideas, gifts, and strengths are recognized as contributing to the success of the practice.

Maybe a certain technician is excellent at connecting with difficult clients or is an expert at always hitting a tricky vein in recalcitrant patients. Providing this employee with additional training or putting her in charge of teaching the rest of the staff are examples of job enrichment that will motivate.

Making Individual Contributions Matter

Herzberg’s contends that we all want to feel that our contributions to our work, the place we spend more than half of our daily life, matters, both to ourselves and to those with whom we work. An exceptional leader strives to recognize each team member’s greatest areas of

potential. Through careful questioning and coaching, these areas of personal excellence are developed, put into full use, and celebrated. *These “specialties” are lauded at staff meetings, rewarded at evaluation time, and encouraged through additional training and development.*

Team members and leaders eventually realize that their distinctive contributions make the veterinary practice a better place to work and also make them more satisfied, willing to innovate, and dedicated to their careers. ■

References

1. **One more time: How do you motivate employees?** Herzberg F. *Harvard Bus Rev* 46(1):53-62, 1968.

Suggested Reading

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Skillset addressed in this article: relational competencies