

MAINTAINING MOTIVATION

1. Rediscover why you first started your job or your sport
2. Avoid over-rewarding for successes
3. Connect rewards to internal attributes
4. Set S.M.A.R.T. goals on a daily basis

Optimal Performance Consulting

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Optimal Performance Newsletter

Improving Performance in Business & Sport: Part II

Motivation & the Overjustification Effect

Sam Maniar, Ph.D.

When coaches, parents, and executives contact me, the word “motivation” often emerges. How do I motivate my players? How can I improve my own motivation? What can I do on days that I feel like garbage? Before delving into the topic of motivation, though, I’d like to share one of my favorite parables.

An old man lived alone on a street where boys played noisily every afternoon. One day, the din became too much, and he called the boys into his house. He told them he liked to listen to them play, but his hearing was failing and he could no longer hear their games. He asked them to come around each day and play noisily in front of his house. If they did, he would give them each a quarter. The youngsters raced back the following day, and they made a tremendous racket in front of the house. The old man paid them and asked them to return the next day. Again they made noise, and again the old man paid them for it. But this time he gave each boy only 20

cents, explaining that he was running out of money. On the following day, they got only 15 cents each. Furthermore, the old man told them he would have to reduce the fee to five cents on the fourth day. The boys became angry and said they would not be back. It was not worth the effort, they said, to make noise for only five cents a day.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is doing something for internal reasons/rewards. People who are intrinsically motivated to play a sport usually say they play because it is “fun”. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is doing something for some external reward. Individuals who are extrinsically motivated to play (like in the case of the parable above) usually play in hopes of winning a championship, earning a scholarship, etc.

Based on research, we know that people who are intrinsically motivated will play or work longer and harder than those that are extrinsically motivated. Moreover, intrinsically motivated athletes and businesspeople are less likely to suffer from burnout.

Loss of Motivation: When the Fun Stops

When people quit sports or jobs that they once enjoyed, a typical response is: “It wasn’t fun anymore.” Why and how does this happen? Psychologists call this the *overjustification effect*. It occurs when we over-reward a child by giving too many external rewards to someone who is already intrinsically motivated to perform. The above parable is a great example of this.

So how can we apply it to sport and business? Let’s take a 10 year-old soccer player who plays because “it is fun.” Now, we add too many extrinsic rewards to the player’s individual and team performance, such as trophies, state championships, and even ice cream after winning. At some point, a motivational shift occurs, so that the child’s motivation changes from an intrinsic focus to an extrinsic focus. As the extrinsic rewards diminish or cease all together, and the intrinsic motivation wanes, the individual loses all motivation and eventually stops playing.

The overjustification effect can also occur in the workplace. Many people lose motivation for things that were once intrinsically motivating after receiving excessive extrinsic rewards for doing the same task. Can you think of employees or colleagues that don’t seem to enjoy their job anymore? Could it be due to excessive rewards?

How to Keep Yourself and/or Your Team Motivated

1. In order to stay motivated in the long-term, you have to first get in touch with why you started playing in the first place. This will help you identify and reconnect with the intrinsic motivators that once motivated you, and will help you continue to refocus on those as you progress in the sport .

2. Secondly, be careful not to over-reward yourself—or (in the case of coaches, parents, and supervisors) your players or employees—for something that is already “fun” or intrinsically-motivating.

3. When a reward is given, connect the reward to something internal, such as effort. The worst thing a parent, coach, or supervisor can do is tie a reward to something external, such as winning, scoring a goal, or making lots of money. External rewards are not completely controllable, whereas internal rewards (like effort) are controllable motivators.

4. Set goals on a daily basis. Goals should be something that is controllable (e.g., effort, attitude, punctuality, marking on defense, moving feet, etc.) as opposed to things out of your control (e.g., winning). Goals should also be developed using the acronym S.M.A.R.T.:

- Specific
- Measurable

- Adjustable
- Realistic
- Time-Oriented.

For more information on goal setting, see Optimal Performance Newsletter #1.

If your organization or team would like help with this, or any other aspect of performance, please let us know. We’d love to help.φ

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