Leadership Skills to Address the Four Categories of Demotivation

David F. Smith, PhD*

Employee motivation is key to a successful medical practice. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are ways to positively affect motivation, but leaders need to be aware of the four main **de**motivators: task orientation; personal emotions; self-confidence; and values. Using the leader qualities of inclusion and respect aids leaders in discovering how these four demotivators are affecting their team members.

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*Director of Research, Five Star Leadership, Oahu Adventures Foundation, Inc., 6960 Feldspar Place, Carlsbad, CA. 92009; phone: 619-876-6343; e-mail: davidsmith@oafound.org.

Hopefully, you have hired motivated employees for your medical practice. That first day/week/year is exciting for the new team member. Because a team leader's main task is getting his or her team members to do what needs doing, new hires are primed to follow their leader and get right to work. Somewhere along the way, employees in a practice may lose their motivation. Managers tracking performance may see a drop-off in productivity. Fellow team members may notice a change in that less-motivated employee's attitude at work. Demotivated employees can cause disruption and may even become dangerous.

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Leaders must understand the reasons for lowered motivation and take steps to reverse it. Although management techniques may uncover the problem, it is skillful leadership that will make the difference in outcomes. Use of good leadership skills proactively addresses the causes of lowered employee motivation. The primary employee motivation discussed here is based on intrinsic rewards, such as valuing their work, relationships with others, and belief that they are an important member of the team. Extrinsic rewards—such as pay scales and vacation time—also are motivating, but intrinsic rewards are the ones that provide leaders their primary means to affect motivation.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS: INCLUSION AND RESPECT

The leadership skills required are two qualities that are foundational in leaders' interactions with team members: inclusion and respect. Although other leader qualities, such as modeling, improvement, and rewarding, are important, inclusion and respect get at the heart of motivation and are key to understanding the reasons for personal motivation and its counterpart, demotivation.

What is meant by defining *inclusion* and *respect* as leader qualities? *Inclusion* describes how a leader communicates with each team member regarding their job and work environment. For example, if a change in work schedules is needed, a leader using inclusion will discuss the organizational need for change with each team member. Although these discussions may not change anything about the rescheduling, having individual discussions will improve the attitudinal outcomes. Because motivation is mostly attitude, this example shows how a leader using inclusion positively affects motivation.

A leader showing *respect* positively affects motivation as well. *Respect* uses active listening coupled with nonverbal communication to show empathy. The leader shows an understanding of the team member's point of view. In the example of the schedule changes, respecting the team member means listening to how they feel and why they feel that way about the change. Respecting the team member partners with the inclusion behavior as the main leadership tool used in inclusion discussions. Inclusion and respect, when used together, can intervene early in the demotivation process. However, a leader has to know what to look for.

FOUR CATEGORIES OF DEMOTIVATORS

Four critical personal categories can affect team members' attitudes. These four demotivators are: (1) task orientation; (2) personal emotions; (3) self-confidence; and (4) values. The following sections discusses these four categories, the problems that can arise in each, and how a practice's team leader can use the leadership qualities of inclusion and respect to make a difference in motivation. Consistency is needed because demotivation is a constant threat.

Task Orientation

Task orientation is about the team member having trouble with his or her work. Although management matrices may show that the employee is having a problem—perhaps billings aren't up-to-date, for example—leadership is about solving the problem one-on-one with the team member. A team member who is having trouble will develop feelings of inadequacy. If a person feels that the job is too much to accomplish, he or she won't be motivated to do the job. Using inclusion isn't always about something changing in the workplace. In this case, inclusion is important in understanding what problem the team member is having with his or her specific tasks.

First, if the leader regularly discusses the work and work environment with each team member, the leader is likely to know there is a productivity problem before he or she receives management reports indicating that there is a problem. The leader will hear complaints such as blaming others for failure. He or she will notice the team member taking longer lunch hours or showing a lack of interest in volunteering for extra-role activities. These changes usually are subtle and can develop slowly, but they can be glaring and fast-acting if the problem is extreme or the team member is extremely sensitive.

Team members who have leaders who use inclusion report better trust relationships with their leaders than those who say that their leader rarely includes them in work discussions. This trusting relationship is central to the partnership between the team leader and team member regarding getting work done. A short discussion can uncover the attitudinal challenge of the employee's feeling that he or she is inadequate for the job being asked of them. When the leader employs the second leader quality, respectful conversation, the team member is more likely to share his or her thoughts. The message a practice leader must look for is their team member signaling that they feel they cannot do the job asked of them. The main point is to be aware that this message may be there and to consistently be available for an open and respectful discussion. Active listening is especially important, because the message may come as a side comment while a completely different subject is being discussed.

Personal Emotions

Personal emotions play a large part in both motivation and demotivation. A happy person at work is more likely to be motivated to do the work needed. A depressed person is less likely to be motivated. The demotivating emotional state may be transient, such as depression due to a recent fight with a spouse, a hangover, or a change in work environment. The transient negative change most likely will be resolved by the team member themselves, and a balanced, hopefully positive, emotional state is regained. Emotions that affect motivation negatively may be long-lasting, however, and may have roots prior to joining the organization.

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The role of leadership regarding team member motivation is awareness. Inclusion and respect provide ample opportunity for leaders to recognize that emotional issues are affecting an employee's motivation. Leaders do not need to be psychotherapists to recognize emotional issues that are affecting job performance. There certainly is a place for advanced emotional care, and this can be recommended to the employee once the problem is recognized. It is recognition that is important here, however.

Using inclusion will allow team members to voice their emotional feelings about the subject at hand. For example, if management is implementing a new benefit program, many employees will not voice their displeasure in a group setting. This displeasure, which is an emotion, can be discussed much more easily one-on-one with a team leader they trust. Empathic listening, the core of respect, plays a huge role in eliciting conversation about feelings. In this example, perhaps the team leader should have had a discussion one-on-one prior to the group presentation as a preventive measure to avoid the negative feelings completely. This may not change the general disagreement the employee has about the change, but the disagreement may not be so charged with emotion as to cause a loss in motivation.

Another way inclusion and respect work well together regarding the challenge emotions present is how these leadership qualities build greater trust with each team member. Empathy, the understanding of the feelings of others, can reveal hidden emotional issues. These conversations are fruitful only if the team member trusts the leader, and trusts that he or she will listen and understand. Understanding that these emotions exist informs a discussion about what can be done about the negative work impact they are having. Again, it is not the leader's role to solve emotional issues, but it *is* the leader's role to

help team members in ways that may lead to a solution. In the best case scenario, the emotions are changed to positives, but in any case, the attentive leader is aware of possible problems.

Self-Confidence

An employee's self-confidence is an input to his or her motivation at work. Earlier, we discussed task-specific demotivation, where the employee doesn't believe he or she knows how to get the job done. This can erode self-confidence, but the role of self-confidence is much greater than this task-specific cause. The task-specific problem affects the competence dimension of self-confidence; but in addition to how employees view their abilities, employees also are concerned with other personal qualities and their judgment.

These three parts of self-confidence—task, competence, and judgment—affect how motivated a team member is about work. The way employees view their own competence beyond task-specific issues leads to a range of feelings such as, "Sure! I can do that," or "There's no way I can succeed in this medical practice." Their personal qualities, such as how they believe they look, are part of their self-image, which directly relates to self-confidence. Leaders will be aware of any issues around this if they are paying attention on a regular basis to how an employee talks about him or herself. Using a respectful inclusion discussion is a way to ask directly how they feel they are doing (abilities) and how they feel about themselves (image) regarding work. This discussion may bring up some great improvement ideas as well—another leadership quality that builds trust.

How a person views his or her own abilities to make sound judgments is part of self-confidence. If employees do not believe in themselves in this way, the lack of confidence creates a lack of motivation. They will not feel confident in making the decisions needed to get the work done right. The leader will find that he or she ends up making these decisions for the team member, and that is not efficient or very effective. When a leader frequently is asked to make others' decisions, he or she should think about whether there is a self-confidence problem with their team member. Discovering this type of problem is easier when using inclusion and respect to discuss the decision at hand. Probing for underlying personal feelings is good leadership, but leaders have to be sensitive and avoid being intrusive.

Values

What a person values will affect his or her motivation regarding both work tasks and the workplace as a whole. If a team member believes his or her work has value, then the person is more likely to be motivated to accomplish it. If, on the other hand, the work is viewed as trivial or wrong, motivation will be very low. When thinking about what someone values, it is important to consider several aspects:

- First, is the work itself viewed as low value? For example, one person might think flipping burgers at a fast-food restaurant is valuable work, whereas another person might not. Both may take the job, but their motivation levels probably will differ.
- Second, are the rewards from the work equal to the value placed on the work by the team member? The rewards are both extrinsic and intrinsic. Are they paid enough cash (extrinsic) and do they get enough job satisfaction (intrinsic) for the work done? This combination is the motivator that keeps employees hard at work if it's sufficient and looking for other work if it is not. Studies have shown that people will give up extrinsic reward for greater intrinsic reward. For example, employers who are seen as "doing good for the community" are able to offer lower pay scales but still attract quality, motivated employees.
- Third, is the work itself in conflict with the strongly held personal beliefs that make up the personal values of the individual? For example, if a person is a vegan, would flipping burgers, no matter the pay, be a job they wouldn't take? Or if they did take the job, would their values affect their motivation? There are many and diverse deeply held values. These values will have varying strength, so good leaders pay attention.

These three concepts describing values and how they might affect motivation should be discussed with each team member. Finding out what team members value and matching those values to the work effort is highly motivating. Less motivating is a leader knowing about those values and not caring. Perhaps nothing can be done to make things at work more consistent with their values, but the discussion of personal values will bring out this issue so it can be dealt with in the best way possible. Consistently being open to discussions of this sort is the important leadership skill here.

SUMMARY

The main definitional difference between management and leadership is that managers design and measure work, whereas leaders motivate team members to do the work. A team leader is both manager and leader. As a good manager, you should "put on your leadership hat" and use the leadership qualities of inclusion and respect to better motivate your team members, one person at a time. Motivation is a complex subject, but if a leader considers the four basic categories of demotivation—task orientation, personal emotions, self-confidence, and values—they have a fighting chance of understanding what is motivating and demotivating their team members. A leader has to keep at the top of his or her mind that having inclusion discussions in a respectful way is preventive care for their team members. ▪▪