

## CHAPTER 12

### *Their Favorite Things*



**A**lthough the approach of finding out what motivates individual employees does take more time and effort up front than fear motivation or incentive motivation, it doesn't require an exponential increase—and the time you invest pays off in a very powerful way.

As you decide for yourself how to proceed with your team's motivation plan and the best investment of your time, consider the following.

*"I do the things I like to do. It's sort of a bigger version of having more than one hobby. — Harry Connick, Jr.*

Attitude motivation is not a short-term fix. It creates a culture where people feel important, where they feel their reasons matter, where they feel they are part of a purpose. Once you invest time and energy into building a culture like that, you stop thinking about merely checking something off a list. Instead, you recognize that what you're doing is important because it's about running your business and managing your team. The payoff becomes more obvious with every passing day.

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Not only that, attitude motivation becomes more intuitive every day. Allow me to share a story that illustrates the point.

## **A STORY ABOUT CHANGING THE CULTURE**

In one of the management weekly programs I designed for a non-profit, I started a conversation about the importance of getting to know your employees—one of the hallmarks of a successful attitude motivation program.

The executive director loved the idea. She agreed to give it a try. A couple of weeks later, she came back to the program and said, “Holy smokes, do I have a story for you.”

I said, “I can’t wait to hear it.”

“We were given an additional incentive from a donor on a program, and everybody that was involved with that program was taken out to a very nice lunch.”

It turned out she meant “very nice.” In Oklahoma City, there is an office building called the Devon Tower. It’s one of the tallest buildings west of the Mississippi, 50+ stories tall, with a restaurant at the top called Vast. Because of the atmosphere and view, it is one of the swankiest restaurants in the area. Even for a business lunch, the tab runs about \$40–50 per person. So it’s pretty nice, especially by Oklahoma standards.

She continued: “I took all of my employees out for lunch there. But nobody really seemed to care. I was kind of dumbfounded. The next day, I did that exercise from the management program to learn more about my employees. One of the things I learned from the exercise was each of their favorite candy bars.”

Here’s a side note: Candy bars are typically 50–80 cents each, depending on how you buy them. She had ten employees. Maximum investment: eight bucks.

She said, “I gave every one of the people I took for lunch their favorite candy bar. Six of those people, without any prompting from me, went to the trouble of sending me handwritten thank-you notes. Not for the lunch—for the candy bars!”

Why do you think the employees gave handwritten notes for the candy bars and not for the \$50 lunches? For one thing, the lunch was not personal. I bet it could have cost twice as much and been twice as fancy, and it still wouldn’t have generated any handwritten thank-you notes. It didn’t tie into their personal reasons for coming to work each day.

The lunch may have actually turned some employees off. I

asked her, “How many of your people feel comfortable, knowing that they work for a nonprofit, going out for a business lunch that is \$40–50 per person? Does that seem like it might actually conflict with the employee’s reasons for working for you?”

She replied, “I never even thought about that!”

Fifty bucks a person for lunch—and the culture will stay the same. But for a 50- or 80-cent candy bar, 60% of the team sends you handwritten thank-you notes—and the culture transforms itself.

## THE TRANSFORMATION

A client of mine recently shared this story. One of his organization’s employees, Pat, was a mid-level performer making a modest salary—\$30,000 a year. This was not a high earner or someone who was on a commission plan. She wasn’t even in the sales department. Tom, her manager (whom I was coaching), found out that Pat had always wanted to take a nice vacation to the Bahamas with her friends. She had talked for years with the people she’d grown up with about going to the Bahamas together, but had never managed to make the trip.

Tom built an interesting clause into Pat’s development plan: If she hit certain measurable personal and professional benchmarks, the company would pay for her to go out on her vacation with the girlfriends she grew up with. What followed can only be described as a transformation.

Pat overachieved all of the targets. Clearly, she was motivated by the critical personal motivator “to do.” This was something Pat

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had wanted to do with her friends for a very long time. The following January, the company paid for Pat's vacation. When she got back, she and Tom started talking with her about her next goal. The grand total spent on her trip to the Bahamas: \$1,500! That's significantly less than they'd have spent on, say, a 10% raise. And Pat has never been happier.

Tom told me: "What we've gotten out of Pat as an employee this year has been more than we could ever have dreamed of. She reduced waste by over 15%, which added up to nearly \$40,000 in savings to the company." That's what can happen when you get good at figuring out the personal motivators that affect attitude.

## HOW TO GET GOOD AT THIS

To improve at attitude motivation, make a conscious effort to get to know your people.

My wife Doyce once held a position where she had several hundred employees who reported to her directly or indirectly. One day she said to me, "Hey, I figured out if that I take the trouble to learn just a few of my employees' favorite things, it's very, very powerful."

Here's what she does. She has every employee in her organization fill out a "favorites" sheet. It contains questions like: What's

your favorite candy bar? What's your favorite holiday? What's your favorite day of the week, and why? What's your favorite type of pizza? What's your favorite type of vacation? What's your favorite activity when you are not working? (Of course, you can customize the questions appropriately for your own team.)

Here's the big secret when it comes to attitude motivation: As the manager, you can gather that information, and then you can use it.

For instance: Instead of taking your people out to a \$50 lunch, you come in early one morning, make a tour of the work stations and leave each of them a personalized handwritten note and a 75-cent candy bar that is their favorite.

Then watch what happens.

**QUESTION**

What is one time when a small personal gesture was more meaningful to you than an expensive incentive or gift?

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**ACTION**

Build a “Favorites Sheet” for your team and have each employee fill it out. Think about things that matter in your world and that would be personal enough to make a connection with your employees. Create headings for such a sheet in the space below.

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