



What Motivates You?

By Wendy Hauser, DVM
Special Consultant
Peak Veterinary Consulting

INTRODUCTION

I was facilitating an interactive workshop for leaders when I asked, “How do you motivate your employees?” This seemingly simple question resulted in silence as each participant considered the question, uncertain how to best respond. What would you have said?

A trait highly desirable in leaders and followers alike, motivation is defined as “internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to a job, role or subject, or to make an effort to attain a goal.”¹ As authors Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Lewis Garrad note “the science of motivation is robust and well-established, it is rarely applied to real-world management practices, which tend to be based on managers’ intuition and subjective experience.”² Is it any wonder that the question posed above caused confusion? How does a leader or an individual learn to apply motivation to life situations?

Types of Motivation

Fred Lee, in “If Disney Ran Your Hospital”³, describes four basic levels of motivation:

The first, or level one, centers around ‘compliance’, which is described as “a disposition to yield to others”⁴. This type of motivation is often referred to as the carrot and stick model. It depends on extrinsic motivators to achieve the completion of a task by a person. Once the external factor is removed or is no longer desirable, the motivation dissipates. As such, this is considered the weakest of the motivational types.

Level two is imposed motivation, termed by Fred Lee as ‘willpower’. Categorized as an extrinsic motivator, ‘willpower’ occurs when the individual completes a task not because they enjoy it. Instead, they feel motivated out of a sense of duty, obligation, or fear of disappointment.

The third level in Mr. Lee’s motivational diagram is ‘imagination’. As he explains, this is a stronger level of motivation because the person is moved to do something that they enjoy and find rewarding. The purpose to attain goals comes from within, so this level is classified as intrinsic motivation. It is at this level that motivational forces are sustainable.

The final level, level four, is ‘habit’. This is such a strong intrinsic motivator that it would be unquestionable not to perform the associated tasks as the unfinished tasks would leave the individual feeling incomplete.

Other authors focus on defining motivation by examining our basic needs as humans. Maslow, in the mid-1950’s, suggested that the fulfillment of certain psychological

needs is as essential to humans as vitamins. In the decades that followed, many additional researchers built on these concepts. Deci and Ryan proposed the foundations of what has become Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT states that there are three basic psychological human needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. These needs are uniform for all people, despite cultural, geographic, and genetic differences. This needs-as-requirements perspective is often used to support the premise that “satisfying these needs leads to positive outcomes, such as increases in well-being or performance towards goals, whereas thwarting the need leads to ill-being or performance decrements”⁵.

In her book, “Why Motivating People Doesn’t Work...and What Does”⁶ author

"Competence is our need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities."

Susan Fowler describes autonomy as “the human need to perceive we have choices...It is our perception that we are the source of our actions.” In her explanation of relatedness, she states it “is our need to care about and be cared about by others...it is our need to feel that we are contributing to something greater than ourselves.” She says “competence is our need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities. It is demonstrating skill over time. It is a sense of growth and flourishing”. She further explains that these three needs are inter-related. When basic psychological needs are being satisfied, the outcomes

are “positive energy, vitality and a sense of well-being”. However, if one of the needs is unfulfilled, the advantages rendered by meeting the remaining needs is diminished.

To more fully explain how the SDT impacts our motivational state, Fowler developed the “Spectrum of Motivation”⁶ model. It is based on the observation that individuals are always motivated; it is the degree of motivation that varies. This model describes six motivational attitudes. These viewpoints are driven both by self-regulation, which she defines as “mindfully managing feelings, thoughts, values and purpose for immediate and sustained positive effort” as well the psychological needs previously discussed. She has further identified two separate motivation states: suboptimal and optimal. Suboptimal, or low-quality motivation occurs when self-regulation and fulfillment of the psychological needs are depressed. Needs go unmet and the motivation is not constructive nor sustainable. Optimal, a high-quality motivational outlook ranks highly in both satisfying psychological needs and self-regulation. This category promotes positive outcomes that are energizing and rewarding. Because the mental state experienced is so satisfying, we seek additional opportunities that would promote similar feelings.

As defined by Fowler, the six motivational attitudes are, from lowest quality (low self-regulation, low psychological needs) to highest quality (fully self-regulated and meeting all three psychological needs) are disinterested, external motivational outlook, imposed motivational outlook, aligned motivational outlook, integrated motivational outlook and inherent motivational outlook. You might appreciate some similarities between some of these attitudes and

the four basic levels of motivation as described by Lee. Alignments are seen when comparing ‘compliance’ and external motivational outlook, ‘willpower’ and imposed motivational outlook, ‘imagination’ and aligned motivational outlook and ‘habit and integrated motivational outlook.

A defining feature between the two authors depictions of motivation is best appreciated by recognizing that Lee’s model portrays highly categorized, stationary motivational states. By contrast, Fowler’s model is predicated on the theory that motivational states are constantly in flux. During the completion of one activity, it is possible to be in all six states at different stages.

An example of this fluidity might be illustrated by examining the process of writing this proceedings article. While I very much enjoy the process of writing, there are some topics that are less challenging to write about than others. The topic of motivation fascinates me, however explaining the psychological aspects of motivation required hours of research. I started this project from the unhealthy starting point of an imposed motivational state: I believe it is important to provide attendees of conferences with information that will aid in the understanding and application of the topics on which I will be presenting. Therefore, the option of not writing an article about motivation was untenable. We do not live in a vacuum; as such, multiple activities and obligations competed for my time. This article, the fourth of four, was authored as I had speaking engagements and the initiation of a new employment situation. My psychological needs of competence and autonomy were not balanced, which led to a sub-optimal motivation quality. As I delved further into the writing project and the research, I shifted to an aligned motivational outlook. This optimal motivation state is

characterized by a higher self-regulation state in that my work had purpose and satisfied my psychological needs. Writing this article shifted from being a chore to an activity that I enjoyed.

To further underscore Fowler's concept of fluctuating motivational states, remember that as humans we rarely ever perform one task exclusively. As I mentioned in the paragraph above, within the time frame of authoring this article, I was also preparing for a three-hour workshop on communications. My motivational state for that activity ranged between imposed (updating power points and practicing the presentation) to aligned as I added new material, and finally integrated as I presented the workshop. Assessing my motivational state after the meeting, I was in an inherent state, the highest and most healthy of all the six motivational attitudes. Similarly, I was experiencing a range of motivational states as I prepared to embark on a new career path.

"Remember that as humans we rarely ever perform one task exclusively."

Applying Motivation to the Workplace

Understanding Fowler's Spectrum of Motivation is key in recognizing that individuals are always motivated. It is

the quality of the motivation that varies. The reason that the participants in the workshop had such a difficult time answering the question "How do you motivate your employees?" is that on a foundational level they understood that their employees were already motivated. The more valuable approach is to ask each team member "What motivates you?". When managers tailor an individual's job expectations with the qualities of self-regulation⁶ (mindfulness, values, and purpose), a shift in the motivational outlook occurs. The employee experiences an optimal motivational state, finding meaning and fulfillment in their work.

Fowler ascertains that motivation is a skill and as such, can be coached. To effectively teach this skill, leaders must first master their own motivational states. This internal dialog necessitates that you break old habits and learn new habits by retraining the limbic system of the brain, responsible for feelings and impulses. Some steps that are useful in reprogramming this system include:

1. Where are you now on the "Spectrum of Motivation"?

Consider which activities result in your optimal motivation states and "why" this happens. Ask trusted peers, mentors, and family members if they have observed endeavors in which you have been fully engaged. Which ones have been harder for you to accomplish, as seen by procrastination, sub-standard performance, lack of enthusiasm or manifested emotionally, in responses that seem out of proportion to the situation? Do your tasks align with your values and purpose? Are your basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competency being satisfied?

2. Where do you want to be?

Are you in a healthy motivational state? How can you reframe necessary activities in which you find yourself in a perpetually sub-optimal motivation state so that the activities align to your values and purpose? Are there some non-critical activities that need to be purposely abandoned? What do you need to do to consciously shift to a healthier motivational outlook?

3. How will you get there?

Recognizing your motivational states involves self-reflection. Taking time during the activity to ask, “Where am I on the Spectrum of Motivation and why am I there?”. This self-awareness is critical in honestly managing your self-appraisal process. This is the first step in learning to consistently stay in the optimal motivational positions.

To help others understand their unique answers to “what motivates” the individual, leaders must be willing to engage in conversations with each team member. It is helpful for the team to first undergo some core values work, as well as understanding their own “why”. Please reference the information contained in “You Are a Skilled Veterinarian... What’s Next?”⁷ Observations that might encourage these conversations

are when leaders see behaviors that suggest sub-optimal motivation, as discussed in #1 above. Other factors that might result in these conversations are when there are team members that have unrealized, recognizable potential or when workplace situations occur that are unhealthy to the leader, an individual team member or the entire team. These are often recognized by feelings of resentment, frustration, tension, stress, or dissatisfaction.

When engaging in these conversations, your goal is to help facilitate a move to an optimal motivational outlook. I use the word ‘facilitate’, because the only person who can make this shift is the individual with whom you are conferring. This is a coaching conversation, best approached by asking questions to help the employee find their own answers. As such, leaders should refrain from problem solving and imposing their needs in the conversation. Leaders should identify what questions could be asked to help the team member understand their motivational state and find ways to shift their current outlook. It is important to be fully present for these conversations; conduct them at a time when there will be no distractions. Finish clearly with the team member, and schedule times for follow-up conversations and coaching.

Conclusion

When contemplating motivation, remember that it is not a leader’s job to motivate their teams! They are already motivated. It is a leader’s job to help themselves, as well as their team members, understand ‘why’ they are motivated and to help them learn how to manage their motivational outlooks. When your team members are in an optimal motivation state, their purpose and values align with their daily activities. Their psychological needs are met. These factors help them to be fully functional, thriving contributing members to your workplace culture. As Susan Fowler concludes “People can flourish as they succeed. This is the promise of optimal motivation”⁶

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wendy Hauser, DVM is the founder of Peak Veterinary Consulting and has practiced for 30+ years as an associate, practice owner and relief veterinarian. She has worked in the animal health industry as a pet health insurance executive and as a technical services veterinarian. Dr. Hauser, passionate about education and innovation, consults with both industry partners and individual veterinary hospitals. She is a regular presenter at veterinary conferences, facilitating workshops on hospital culture, associate development, leadership, client relations and operations. Frequently published, she is the co-author of “The Veterinarian’s Guide to Healthy Pet Plans.” Learn more about Peak Veterinary Consulting at www.peakveterinaryconsulting.com.

REFERENCES

¹<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/motivation>

²<https://hbr.org/2017/02/if-you-want-to-motivate-employees-stop-trusting-your-instincts>

³Lee, F. If Disney Ran Your Hospital, 2004

⁴www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compliance

⁵Prentice, M., Halusic, M., & Sheldon, K. (2014). Integrating Theories of Psychological Needs as Requirements and Psychological Needs as Motives: A Two Process Model. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 8(2), 73-85.

⁶Fowler, S. *Why Motivating People Doesn’t Work...and What Does*, 2014

⁷Hauser, W. “You Are A Skilled Veterinarian...What’s Next?” *American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine Proceedings*, 2017

This is a restricted article sent to you for educational purposes only and may not be copied or disseminated without written consent from Peak Veterinary Consulting, LLC

ASPCA PET HEALTH
INSURANCE

