

Motivation: What is it that motivates you?

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A generation ago and still important today are Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Anyone who has taken a management course will be familiar with a depiction of a pyramid showing the 5 needs that basically include:

Self Actualization
Self Esteem/Self Respect
Belonging/Love/Appreciation
Safety: Security and Stability
Physiology: Food, Shelter, Environment

So when you are pondering the question of what motivates you, you need to recognize that the answer to the question depends on where you are at any moment in time in your life—and then recognize that circumstances change. The same holds true for your employees. It is easy to presume that putting food on the table and a roof over one's head is a basic need surpassed early in one's career. But overextended debt may challenge that presumption. Likewise, security evaporates quickly when there is a death in the family or when you find yourself in an abusive relationship.

In December of 1999, awaiting the new millennium, we felt confident in our future: unemployment was at an all-time low, the stock market at an all-time high, and America was securely at peace with the world and with itself. Maslow's basic needs—food, shelter, and safety—probably felt a little archaic.

September 11 certainly challenged our sense of safety and security. The deep recession that followed reminded us of the challenge of paying the mortgage and putting food on the table. Layoffs and downsizing replaced sign-on bonuses and stock options.

The year 2004 finds us again in a different place as we ponder the question of motivation. And it is important to contemplate that question in order to maximize your potential and the potential of each employee within your credit union. If you want to retain good employees, increase productivity, you have to know what motivates them. What motivates you and each employee is as personal and diverse as the number of people who read this article. Recognizing that motivation changes with circumstances is equally important.

With changes in the workforce, in the economy, in the world, and in expectations, come more varied responses to the question of "What motivates you?" Before you put in a new incentive program, before you develop a sales contest, before you change your benefits package, be sure you know what motivates your employees. And, be sure to remember how quickly those motivations may change.

How does any good manager know what motivates employees? Ask them! Look at your demographics. Conduct an employee opinion survey. But don't assume you know the answer. *Your* motivators are not



necessarily your employees' motivators. Managers, even the great ones, do not motivate their employees. However, good managers have learned to recognize what it is that motivates each person reporting to him/her.

What motivates you? Have you figured it out yet? Is it the same today as it was a year ago? Five years ago? Twenty five years ago? Probably not. Nor is it the same for any of your employees. Motivation—it is critical for success; it is worth pondering.

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