



Chip Toth

FMI Corporation

55 Madison Street
Suite 410
Denver, CO 80206
Tel: 303.377.4740
Fax: 303.377.3535

5151 Glenwood Avenue
Suite 100
Raleigh, NC 27622
Tel: 919.787.8400
Fax: 919.785.9320

5301 West Cypress
Suite 201
Tampa, FL 33607
Tel: 813.636.1364
Fax: 813.636.9601

www.fminet.com/LeadershipInstitute

The Lost Art of Motivating

One visit to Sea World and one gets a quick lesson on the art of motivating. While the crowd files into their seats that surround the giant pool, the killer whales routinely swim in circles waiting for show time. The whale fans have paid good money for this show and will not settle for a mediocre whale that routinely swims laps in circles. But, how do you get a killer whale to jump thirty feet in the air culminating in a splash that sends the first three rows home soaked and amazed? And, if you ever took a cruise in Alaska you would notice that the killer whales do not jump thirty feet in the air nor do they dish out a super splash alongside the cruise ship hoping to soak the people standing along the rail.

Killer whales require the same thing that killer-workers require — reward and praise. The trainer takes a long bar and places it 20 feet below the surface to make it easy for the whale to succeed. And every time that giant whale swims over the top of the bar the trainer shouts praise and encouragement and throws a giant fish meal. Once they have the whale trained and performing successfully at the 20 foot level, they raise the bar several feet. Again, each time that whale passes over the top of the bar, out comes the praise and reward — celebration and more fish. Ultimately, the whale is so high on praise and reward that he finds himself reaching heights of performance he never thought possible.

Imagine yourself as a vocational marine life consultant for a moment. What advice would you give the trainer of a killer whale in terms of what not to do to motivate the whale to reach new performance heights? You might start with, *“Never, never beat on the whale or poke it with sharp objects. Killer whales do not respond well to this kind of training and ‘motivation.’ In fact, they may choose to make a dramatic change in their diet right there in the midst of your training expediting your retirement.”* You may also advise, *“Never, never raise the bar without first praising and rewarding the whale. The whale needs positive reinforcement for its efforts and will become discouraged if fed a steady training diet of being over-challenged and under-praised.”* With this advice, you should be paid well for a whale of a consulting job!

Now, the big question — would you change any of the above principles and

practices in your training of killer-workers? More often than not, I hear of leaders who are stingy in doling out praise and recognition to their best contributors. In fact, after they withhold praise and reward (no celebrating and no fish!) they *immediately raise the bar* on the worker! Of course the worker responds with high energy, great amounts of enthusiasm, and increased commitment! Right! How big was that fish you caught?

The Human Nature Factor

Great leaders are great motivators! And, great workers love following the leadership of a great motivator. The humble truth is that everyone, both leaders and followers, require a healthy level of praise, recognition, and reward. One of my mentors put it this way, “Every human being has the need to know and be known, to love and be loved, to serve and be served, and to celebrate and be celebrated.” (Bill Hybels)

Because of this inner drive *to be known, loved, served, and celebrated*, I define motivation as follows:

“Unleashing the internal passion within your team members to reach their full work potential.”

I submit to you that there is a passion flame within each of your employees awaiting a motivating leader to bring it forth and fan it into a great fire. This is true for even that “sleeper” in your company. The one you have considered assigning the role of speed bump in the office parking lot. Leaders who are skilled motivators often resurrect the passion within their people! They don’t bring their people to life but they do bring the life out of their people.

I have watched leaders, who have trained themselves in the discipline and skill of encouragement, have great impact on others and their organizations. It amazes me that leaders are so frugal with their praise when I witness the great response of their workers to often just a small amount of praise!

Reasons why leaders are praise scrooges:

1. They fail to understand the need in others.

2. They fail to make it a priority.
3. They fear the worker will take advantage of them.
4. They fear the worker will relax into mediocrity.
5. They feel awkward with this “soft” behavior.

Given the results of a high praise and reward culture versus a high fear and neglect culture, we are left with only one option. In addition, there is a more compelling reason than results: *People Matter!* People have intrinsic value and worth. People are not tools to be manipulated for greater profits or personal glory. *People Matter!* (Repeat this three times to yourself). The leader is a steward with the sober yet exciting responsibility of raising the employee’s awareness of his or her intrinsic value and full potential. It is in this stewardship that the leader actually has a godlike role in shaping the belief and potentiality of people. Pretty awesome, isn’t it?

How to Motivate

Let me suggest a few simple and actionable steps to help you become a Motivating Leader who will raise both the personhood and the performance of others:

- 1. See It, Say It!** When you see good behavior, new skills, sacrifice, accomplishment...right there, right then...Say It! Put in words of praise what you have observed and speak them to the worker. “See It, Say It.”
- 2. Practice “The Circle of Praise.”** Gather a team of workers together to celebrate one or more individuals. Instruct the “celebrated” to remain silent for this exercise while instructing the “celebrators” to speak specific praises to the “celebrated.” This is especially impactful just after a team member has landed a new project, solved a major problem, endured a draining stretch of prolonged and challenging work, and so on.
- 3. The 10:1 Principle:** For every 1 correction provide 10 praises. People are most responsive to correction when they believe their leader is for them and believes in them. Don’t get so hung up on the ratio that you miss the main point of building a high-motivation culture of praise that provides support and impact for those times of correction.

4. 360 Motivation: Motivate your subordinates, your peers, and your manager(s). Everyone needs motivation and inspiration, even your boss. (Here's a secret: your boss may need more praise and celebration than anyone else in the company. The job they have is taking a chunk out of their backside every day. Learn how to send them sincere praise and you will strengthen and prolong their careers). Recently we practiced this with a president who had endured a number of long years riddled with complexity and heavy responsibility. His face and posture told us the whole story. Yet, as his senior team directed praise and appreciation in his direction, you could visibly see the color return to his face, his shoulders straighten, the confidence swell in his chest, and the sparkle appear in his eyes! And, the whole thing required 4 minutes!

5. Be Specific! Praise that is overly general and vague is a waste of your energy and falls on unbelieving ears. Be specific with your praise: "John, your estimating of the XYZ project was best of class. You were accurate, timely, and won the respect of the customer. It is this kind of estimating that is making us a great company!"

Leader, do you want to see workers achieve killer results? Learn the discipline and skill of motivating: *Unleash the internal passion within your team members to reach their full work potential.* This is your stewardship, this is your privilege!

About FMI

Founded in 1953 by Dr. Emol Fails, FMI provides management consulting, training, and capital services for the worldwide construction industry.

FMI delivers innovative, customized solutions to contractors, engineers, architects, environmental firms; manufacturers and suppliers of building products and construction equipment; construction materials producers; private owners, government agencies, utility companies; surety companies; and trade associations.

FMI's experienced consultants can assist your business with compensation planning, leader and organizational development, business development, strategic market information, acquisition integration, mergers and acquisitions, ownership transition, private equity financing, project delivery improvement, management and field-level training, strategic planning, strategic sourcing, and productivity improvement.

Chip Toth is a consultant and executive coach with FMI's Leadership Group. Chip speaks on topics such as How to Motivate your Workers, How to Lead Generation X&Y, and The Art of Leader Development. Chip also works at FMI's Leadership Institute. He can be reached at 303.398.7271 or by email at ctoth@fminet.com.

2004 FMI Corporation. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, or by any means, without permission from the publisher, FMI: 919.785.9220.