Home Away From Home: A Discussion on the Building Blocks of Leadership, Motivation, and Company Success

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Abstract

In this day and age, people spend more and more time at work. It is not uncommon for people with full time jobs to work over eight hours a day, five days a week or even more. With this much time spent at the office, the company one works for becomes their home away from home. And everybody wants a strong, happy, stable home; a place where they can look forward to spending their time, to enjoying themselves, growing, developing, and contributing to something they deem worthwhile.

One should build their company the way they build their home. Pick the right people which lays the groundwork for a strong foundation. Give them room to flourish, making them stable. Lead them and respect them. A happy home is one where we want to spend a lot of time at, helping lead to employee retention, increasing engagement, and ensuring longevity.

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Problem Statement

People spend more and more time at work. Companies rely heavily on their people. What steps can be taken in order to ensure the most motivated and engaged group of people? People are the life source of any organization, and it is through support, recognition, empowerment, trust, being valued, communication, support and strong leadership that one can build the best team possible.

Executive Summary

In this day and age, people spend more and more time at work. It is not uncommon for people with full time jobs to work over eight hours a day, five days a week or even more. With this much time spent at the office, the company one works for becomes their home away from home. And everybody wants a strong, happy, stable home; a place where they can look forward to spending their time, to enjoying themselves, growing, developing, and contributing to something they deem worthwhile.

As with any house or structure, the quality of the foundation it is built upon is of the utmost importance. The people in your company build that base on which the rest of your company lies. The jobs they do help build the walls and columns that keeps everything in its place. The workplace environment brings in the beautiful details of the home, showcasing the successes that people create while doing their jobs. So how does one go about building a strong home-away-from-home? Fortunately, it is not all about money. Non-financial motivators such as recognition, empowerment, trust, being valued, clear communication, support and leadership make all the difference.

Feeling valued and respected leads to an emotional attachment to work. Motivating and encouraging departmental, interdepartmental, and external collaborations with clients promotes synergy, growth, the creation and honing of expertise, and an environment of collaboration. When done right, a group of people does much more together than they would were they to sum up their work as individuals. Happy employees leads to satisfied employees which leads to loyal employees which leads to motivated employees which leads to success for everyone.

One should build their company the way they build their home. Pick the right people which lays the groundwork for a strong foundation. Give them room to flourish, making them stable. Lead them and respect them. A happy home is one where we want to spend a lot of time at, helping lead to employee retention, increasing engagement, and ensuring longevity.

Introduction

In this day and age, people spend more and more time at work. It is not uncommon for people with full time jobs to work over eight hours a day, five days a week or even more. With this much time spent at the office, the company one works for becomes their home away from home. And everybody wants a strong, happy, stable home; a place where they look forward to spending their time, to enjoying themselves, growing, developing, and contributing to something they deem worthwhile. A place where they can feel engaged and motivated.

Steve Wendel of HR Post, defines engagement as "the emotional attachment an employee has to their work; that attachment is strongly related to increased discretionary effort, retention, and presenteeism at work." He lists the following factors as having the most impact on engagement and motivation:

- "The person who's doing the job,
- The job the person is doing,
- The workplace environment in which someone does their job."

As with any house or structure, the quality of the foundation it is built upon is of utmost importance. The people in your company build that base on which the rest of your company lies. The jobs they do help build the walls and columns that keeps everything in its place. The workplace environment brings in the beautiful details of the home, showcasing the successes that people create while doing their jobs. So how does one go about building a strong home-away-from-home? Fortunately, it is not all about money. Non-financial motivators make all the difference -- no matter the pay, the environment matters just as much, if not more.

The Foundation – It Starts With the Individual

First and foremost, any business, in order to succeed, has to hire the right people. As elusive and random as that may sound, there is groundwork that goes into selecting the right people, which can and should be done.

Any business should have a clear mission and vision statement. More importantly, that has to be communicated to every single employee. If your business has a clearly defined set of values, those should be shared too, and should be used as a guide for business decisions. Understanding what your business stands for, what its' purpose is, what it wants for the future, and what values are integral to its existence helps employees live and breathe the company. Sometimes, simply not communicating those few items leaves the open space for people to do things however they feel is best, without necessarily considering the overarching business ideals or even working towards different goals entirely. And who can blame them? If you don't know where you are or where you are going, does it matter how you get there, or even if you get anywhere at all? Creating that vacuum of information and alignment simply leaves space for people to have a shortsighted view of work, spending their energy on surviving the day to day operations without necessarily being mindful of tomorrow.

Having a clearly defined mission and vision statements also helps in the recruitment process. While recruiting can be done various ways, and different approaches work for different companies and objectives, having a clear mission and vision allows human resources and management to create an ideal employee profile with characteristics and values that align with the company's own objectives and culture. As Steve Wendel states, "high engagement starts with the right people in the right jobs for them."

Alan Fairweather, of Business Know-How, poses the following question: "Do you want a highly motivated team who don't take time off work, don't keep looking for other jobs, and make a positive contribution to your business?" Who would actually say no to that? No one. Nicole Fallon of Business News Daily aptly describes that "[e]very company strives for high-engagement levels among its employees. Employees who are passionate about their jobs and organizations are happier, more productive and tend to stay at a company longer." The Marcus Buckingham Co. (TMBC) study she references in her article, however, shows some saddening facts. Only between 13% and 19% of employees worldwide reported feeling fully engaged with their work and company. That shows how much more can be done to improve the work environment. But how does one achieve that?

Torben Rick of Meliorate points out that, yes, financial factors can be important in attracting and retaining quality employees, but when it comes to the daily grind, it is the non-financial variables that make a difference.

A company is only as good as their people, and their people are only as good as their motivation. Your products and services may be fine, but they will be better with people who care behind them. So now you have the people. What next? There are a slew of non-financial motivators that can be implemented to strengthen that base, which go beyond an individual's own initiative and interest and delves into what their company gives them leeway for. It's important for people to work somewhere where they feel valued, recognized, supported, and empowered.
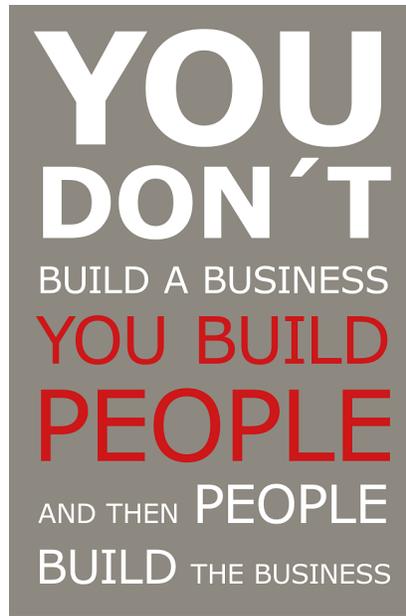
Figure 1 - Credit: Torben Rick

Stability - It's Not Just What You Do

Yes, people are crucial to the strong foundation of any institution. In order to create the best work place you can, Wendel suggests starting with direct supervisors. Choosing the right managers is crucial. He quotes Les McKeown, CEO of Predictable Success: "The problem is with your managers, not your employees. If your employees are disengaged, your managers are at fault." Proper leadership and management keeps things stable. Without that, the foundation will start to tear apart and weaken. Fallon points to a study from TMBC, which shows that anywhere in the world, the single-most important driver of engagement and motivation was being able to use their strengths at their work. While secondary factors varied in importance when it came to mission, social dynamics, and trust, everyone believed that being able to play to their strengths made them feel at their best. Rick points to a study by Mercer that leaves no doubt that non-financial motivators are among the most important factors for their motivation:
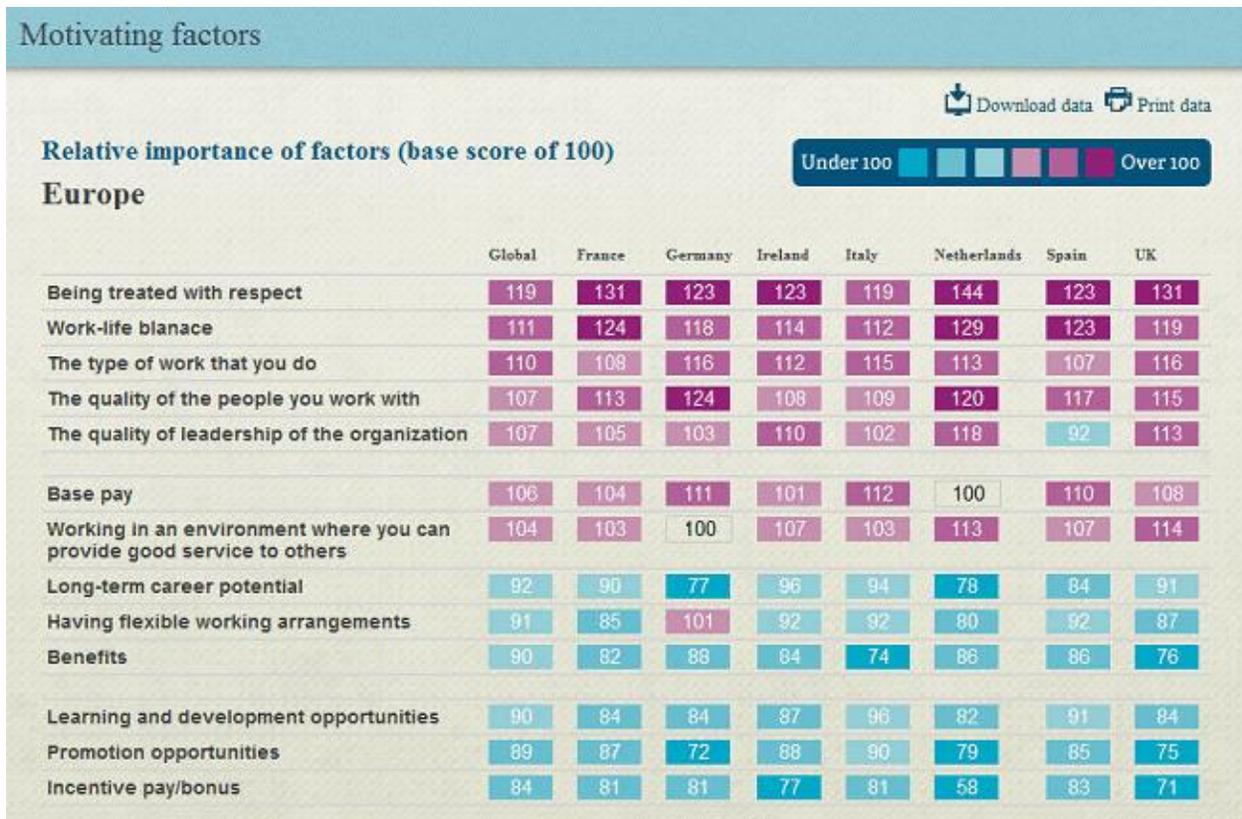
Figure 2 – Credit: Mercer Data/Torben Rick

They are all correct. Good leaders can create the environment needed to help their employees feel satisfied with the factors that matter to them the most. As Wendel's analysis of the UK's Institute for Employment Studies data on engagement shows, a leader that can make their employees feel valued is one of the most important factors of engagement. Fairweather also suggests that managers should be "believers." It is allowing all employees to feel empowered in the work they do, which, according to him, means "utilizing the knowledge, skill, experience and motivation power that's already within" to perform their tasks and reach their goals. That sense of value and empowerment does not come from one single source. Making people involved in decision-making, giving them the space to be heard, giving them opportunities to grow, and feeling that their company cares about them contributes to that sense of value (Wendel, 2014). Wendel states that managers, leaders, and HR have a crucial role in making sure that all team members are at a good place at work. He also points to an acronym created by author Paul Marciano in regards to RESPECT:

- **R**ecognition
- **E**mpowerment
- **S**upportive feedback
- **P**artnering
- **E**xpectations
- **C**onsideration

- **T**rust

The various aspects of RESPECT are seen in a variety of ways that companies and their employees can work on to make a more successful and productive workplace. Wendel states, for example, that feeling good about one's job actually has nothing to do with being able to do whatever you want. What matters in that regard is the feeling that their role in the organization means something. It is knowing how their tasks contribute to the greater goals the organization is trying to achieve. This doesn't mean, however, that jobs should be boring and static. As discussed by Wendel, the work in and of itself should "be interesting and challenging, have variety, allow the use of different skills, and allow personal discretion (autonomy)." People should feel a sense of ownership for their role. They should be empowered to make decisions that are appropriate to their job level, and be given a bit of room to make their role their own. No one needs to be given a free pass to do whatever they like. Life is life and people have a job they have to do. But flexibility to add their mark to their job, to have a work style, is important.

The Job Interview Site also discusses the importance of having clear, achievable goals. The focus on specific and achievable goals that are also challenging can be true motivators, especially if employees are part of the goal setting process. The same can be said about task delegation. Some things simply have to be done by certain people. Such is the reality of having a job. However, having clear expectations and the knowledge of where your tasks fit in the grander scheme of the organization in which you are inserted helps create purpose, and more importantly, helps them know what exactly they are working towards (Job Interview & Career Guide, n.d.). Ambiguous goals may lead to a manager expecting one thing, and the managed assuming the goal is something else entirely. This leads to waste of resources and a failure due to miscommunication, and when does that ever feel good? No one is perfect all the time, and nobody knows exactly what is needed from them if they are not actually told what is expected from them.

Beyond clear communication on goals, employees should also know when they are doing something well. That is not as simple as it sounds, though. If the answer to employee happiness and productivity includes recognition, let's just recognize everyone for everything. That ought to drive satisfaction and productivity through the roof! Right? Unfortunately, recognition doesn't work quite like that. While some may think that recognition sounds like something that is obvious and probably already done anyways, the reality is much bleaker. Bersin & Associates point out the following statistics:

- 17% of employees in their study stated that their companies have a culture that strongly support recognition.
- 87% of organizations, however, stated that they do have recognition programs.
- 58% of employees think their companies have recognition programs
- 70% of respondents are either recognized annually, or not at all.
- 80% of senior leaders think their employees are recognized at least monthly
- 43% of senior leaders think their employees are recognized weekly or more often
- 40% of managers think their employees are recognized at least monthly
- 22% of individual contributors think they are recognized at least monthly

These statistics from the Bersin report show the reason why recognition done right matters. Despite the majority of surveyed organizations having recognition programs, less than a fifth of employees recognized them as actually meaningful. They also show that what companies' think they are doing and what their employees think their companies are doing are two different things entirely. But this is not an excuse to simply start doling out empty compliments right and left, in an attempt to boost morale. As The Muse writes in their article on Forbes.com, "Just because you want to call out one employee for a stellar accomplishment doesn't mean you have to figure out a way to recognize every other team member in that same moment."

Recognition must be sincere. There is a right time and a right way to do it. It has to mean something. Yes, everyone should be recognized, but recognition should be earned too. It is much more inspiring to work hard when you know that people notice when you go the extra mile and commend you for it. Not all employees are created equal. Recognition should not be either. People know when they work hard and people know when they don't. Doling out blanket recognition is much like a participation trophy at the end of a game: it means you were there. Being the one and only MVP, however, that is where true pride shines through (The Muse, 2013). Don't get me wrong, showing up to work is half the battle, but it's having your actual performance recognized that really makes it all the better. The Job Interview Site is also a believer in recognition and the power of positive feedback. They warn, "If you offer no recognition for a job well done by your team members, the likely scenario is that the next time they will not do their jobs as expected. Why? Because if their good performance is not appreciated, they will think; 'Why bother? No one appreciates it anyway.'" They also know that feedback is not meant to be positive only: "If they fail to achieve something, conduct a lesson learned procedure." This means using the time as a teaching and growth moment (Job Interview & Career Guide, n.d.).

Bersin & Associates mention in their report that "recognition plays a much more measureable role in business performance than previously believed." Their study showed that "in organizations where recognition occurs, employee engagement, productivity and customer service are about 14 percent better than in those where recognition does not occur." As The Muse puts it, there are several ways to recognize someone, and they should all be used when appropriate. There are people who may prefer that their recognition be given in front of everyone, with rights to applause. There are other times where people may prefer recognition in a one-on-one private setting. Recognition may come verbally, or written out too. It could be a thoughtful email, a kudos during a team meeting, a formal awards ceremony... Good managers take the time to figure out what is more effective for their people and for the different accomplishments (The Muse, 2013).

As stated by Bersin, being recognized when recognition is deserved, and receiving specific feedback about it is more important than an annual employee appreciation ceremony. The Forbes article by The Muse gives the example below in their piece, of feedback and recognition done right in a small moment that could happen in a day-to-day interaction:

Good: "Thanks for your hard work, Cathy!"

Better: "Thanks for putting in so much hard work to win over that new client, Cathy!"

> **Best:** *"Cathy, I can't tell you how much I appreciate your hard work to land the new Smith account. We've been after that account for several months, so you really stepped up to close an important deal. This is a huge win for you, our team, and the entire company."*
>
> *(The Muse, 2013)*

Which would YOU prefer?

Something else about recognition that The Muse notes... while the most proliferous source of recognition probably will be, and should be, the manager, it's even better to create an environment where people feel good about recognizing and encouraging their peers. It's not just managers that appreciate a job well done, or the only ones that notice either. Fairweather warns that the attitude of "why should I praise people when they're only doing what they're paid to do?" must be dropped. It is important that people be recognized for the good work they do, if anything so that they know what it is they are doing right and keep doing it. And by all this, it does not mean only limit yourself to an arbitrary quantity of recognition... What really matters, says The Muse, is that the recognition comes from actual good performance that is indeed recognition worthy, and not just recognition out of a sense of duty to make everyone feel included.

Details – Achieving Company Success

Another thing that must be done is creating a good environment for work. More hours, for example, does not necessarily lead to more productivity. Often, long, grueling hours have the opposite effect. Everyone is so worn out, so worn thin, that they do less work, less well, and with less passion. What you really want is to help your employees find balance in their lives, not just having time to enjoy their personal time with their friends and family, but also being able to enjoy themselves at work.

It is also important to note that teamwork is crucial, as nobody ever really works alone. They invariably have to interact with someone or another eventually. Creating a good social atmosphere at work makes people excited to come to work. If they feel like they get a chance to see friends every day, how can you not get excited and smile about that? Much better than waking up and thinking "great... time to go spend 8 more hours with those people..." It's about quality time too, not just quantity of time.

Team Builders Plus lists the following items as a crucial part of team motivation:

- "Purpose
- Challenge
- Camaraderie
- Responsibility
- Growth
- Leadership"

Fallon takes it further, and highlights some of TMBC's recommendations for improving motivation and engagement among teams:

- "Engage team members in the mission of the organization.
- Provide clear expectations.
- Strengthen shared values
- Understand person-job fit characteristics for each employee.
- Build team camaraderie, trust and communication.
- Recognize good work.
- Remove job ambiguity and invest in growth opportunities for each team member."

It is so important for people to feel they are valued and cared for. Having the space to learn and grow, having opportunities for professional development, and to be encouraged. But it is important to know that not everyone wants to take more classes for example, or attend a seminar. Feedback and coaching and mentorship should be options too. That helps create a support system, and trust, not just between managers and the managed, but among peers.

Fairweather discusses the importance of quality time and feedback between managers and employees. He posits that regular quality feedback, even if just a minute or two at a time are more important and effective than a one hour yearly review. These smaller moments spread throughout the year means a better chance to know your team, gain their trust, and build a positive relationship. Not only that, but spending time throughout the year, as opposed to waiting for an arbitrary review date shows a constant state of caring for one's employees, and also helps detect and solve problems at a much earlier stage than perhaps would otherwise occur if the main point of feedback and fixes were hinged around an yearly review. Also, frequent discussions allows everyone to be on the same page.

As Team Builders Plus puts it, "[a] team whose members are aligned with its purpose, feel a challenge in their task, have a strong sense of camaraderie, feel responsibility for the outcome, and experience growth as a team and in their personal lives, will tend to sustain motivation over the long haul." Fairweather also agrees on the importance of feedback and coaching, making it clear that feedback is not just recognition for a job well done, but also being able to respectfully and positively approach shortcomings in a manner that helps fix the situation in a positive way which promotes learning and growth.

In Fallon's interview with Marcus Buckingham, the founder of TMBC, the importance of appropriately equipped leaders was made clear. "Engagement is low because team leaders — not programs and policies — build engagement, and unfortunately organizations don't give team leaders either the training or the tools to succeed in engaging their teams," states Buckingham.
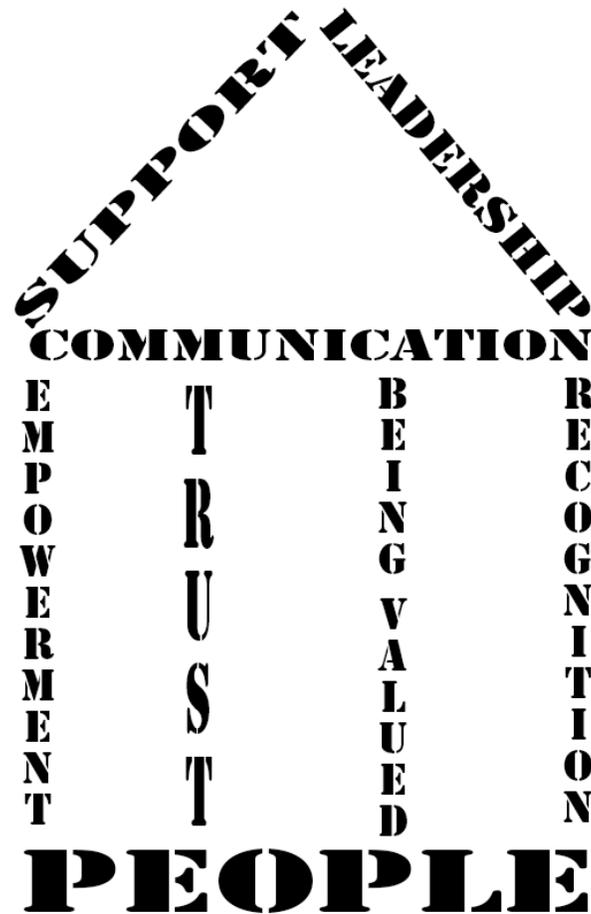
Conclusion

Figure 3 - Image by Mary Anne Matos

The Job Interview Site suggests that if you are a manager, you should stop to think about why you want to motivate your team. Take the time to go beyond the obvious surface level thoughts in order to dig deep into *your* motivations. They also suggest defining who your team members are and what they should be. It is important to know what you have and what you still need. It not only helps with recruitment, but it also helps with making the best use out of your team and the resources and talents they bring to the table. It is also not just important to know your team because of how you can use them, but it is also important to understand what motivates *them*. Different people have different motivators. Good leaders know how to best reach their employees and draw out the best in them by catering to their individualities. The Job Interview Site even suggests directly asking them what they want to achieve on a regular basis, which better helps managers understand employee goals and also

redirect them as necessary to better align them with the company's overall mission and objectives. As they state, "If you understand your employees, they will take more interest in understanding what you want from them."

Doing all the things mentioned above leads to a healthy workplace environment. No one actually wants to work somewhere toxic. Who would make that choice when faced with something healthy? Feeling valued and respected leads to an emotional attachment to work. Elimination of unnecessary barriers helps people be more productive, not just because they have less to do, but because it is less cumbersome to do so. Motivating and encouraging departmental, interdepartmental, and external collaborations with clients promotes synergy, growth, the creation and honing of expertise, and an environment of collaboration. When done right, a group of people does much more together than they would were they to sum up their work as individuals. Happy employees leads to satisfied employees which leads to loyal employees which leads to motivated employees that leads to success for everyone.

One should build their company the way they build their home. Picking the right people lays the groundwork for a strong foundation. Giving them room to flourish makes them stable. Lead them and respect them. A happy home is one where we want to spend a lot of time at, helping lead to employee retention, increasing engagement, and ensuring longevity.

Most importantly, The Job Interview Site also believes in trusting your team. Leaders should set the tone, clarify expectations, observe, and make sure things are on track. They are not there to dictate how things ought to be done down to every minute step of the way. "Teamwork motivation cannot be achieved by force." Many times, they say, by being able to let go, you may very well find yourself surprised by an outcome that surpasses your expectations.

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