

HBSAA Steps to Success: Aligning Motivations and Goals

Public and private organizations often define success by establishing a mission with tactical goals. But to move toward success, business managers must be able to get the wheels turning by moving people to action.

In a high paced workplace focused on surviving in a tight economic market, this seemingly simple concept is often overlooked. The result? Tires with slow leaks that eventually sideline your organization as a team of experts ask “how did this happen?”

The multiple facets of understanding and predicting human behavior is much more complex and nuanced than the wheels on your car.

In the time of Henry Ford, American businesses filled their offices and factories with workers who were satisfied with a stable pay check to provide for their families. Today businesses are challenged with recruiting and retaining the brightest and best of the American workforce who demand more than their parents and grandparents stable paycheck. Not only are employees assessing salary and benefits when choosing an organization or field of work, but the American workforce is looking for work in an environment that fulfills an intrinsic need driven by personal motivations. All employees have personal motivations that drives waking up in the morning and walking through the doors of their workplace - whether it is a factory or home office.

The manager’s challenge is to understand the personal motivations of people not simply to recruit and retain the best, but to effectively move them to action individually and as a team toward success. While this can be a challenge in a professional workplace, the four step approach below will set top notch organizations and managers apart from the rest.

HBSAA’s Steps to Success:

- Step 1 Know Your Own Motivations**
- Step 2 Develop a Relationship of Trust**
- Step 3 Observe, Affirm and Ask**
- Step 4 Align Goals**

Step 1: Know Your Own Motivations

The first step to understanding the motivations of another individual is to understand your own. Have you ever stopped and taken a moment to ask yourself, “why am I here?” “What is unique about me that drives me to continue?” “What draws me to this line of work, to this organization?”

These seemingly simplistic questions are critical to understanding what draws people to the field of work, the organization and to you. The more we understand our own behavior, the better we can understand others.

For example, I recently coached a manager of a fortune fifty corporation during a major organization restructuring. He came to me asking “how do I garner the support and cooperation of my team during this significant job change?” Like most mergers, the entrenched team had automatic reluctance to a change in their roles. The team had lost

many of their colleagues due to regular lay offs and the team was experiencing insecurity regarding the stability of their jobs.

The first questions I asked Carl (an anonymous name to maintain confidentiality) was “why do you care, why is this important to you?” He responded, “because I want this project to be successful and I need the cooperation of the team to make this successful.” I replied, “Yes, I know, but there is something significant in you that wants this to succeed, what is it?” Carl pondered the question and stated, “I’ve been trusted by my boss to lead this merger and this is an opportunity to do well, this project can highlight my unique skills such as managing multiple personalities through change which can, in turn, provide a promotion.”

“Ok Carl, you’re motivated by the chance to prove to your organization that you have what it takes to handle difficult projects while highlighting your uniqueness that could result in a promotion, is that correct?”

Carl agreed and off we went to discuss his team. Carl was motivated by position and respect. This is simple but important information. Carl’s manager had made a wise move to give Carl this opportunity to soar and excel given Carl’s motivations.

Step 2: Develop a Relationship of Trust

In order to identify the core motivations for colleagues or employees, a relationship must be developed that nurtures and builds trust. To do so, an individual needs to know that you care as a manager and have the best interest of the individual at hand. This is probably the most difficult area to develop because it breaks traditional boundaries of the workplace and creates a more caring atmosphere.

Relationship building starts and continues by taking an interest in the personal and professional developments of the individual and having the courage to share about yourself. Asking employees how they are, how they are doing in their department, how their children are, how the golf game went the weekend before and being willing to take a moment to listen goes a long way in letting them know you care about their well being.

For example, when Carl talked about his team members, I asked him about the individuals on his team and his relationship with them. “What do you know about your team members outside of work, what is important to them?” “How do they feel about their work and what tendencies do you notice when they are stressed or doing well?” “Do you feel you can connect with your team members, if so, how?”

Carl shared with me that while he does care about his team, he never had the time to ask these types of questions. Carl started to implement relationship building into his one-on-one meetings with individuals on the team. During our next coaching call, two weeks later, Carl shared with me what he learned about his manager’s golf game and Scott’s daughter who had a tough week at school. In addition, Carl expressed his discovery regarding team member Craig who struggles with vague concepts or requests that sway from written policies. Craig had offered Carl additional detail about his life and his background that helped Carl understand Craig’s core comfort levels. Because of Carl’s outgoing questions and subsequent observations, Carl was able to request participation

from Craig to assist in writing new process documents that were clear and specific. This engaged Craig who then allied himself to the successful outcome of the project.

Carl had built in time to build relationships with his team and was seeing results. He was then able to adapt his process to increase involvement from the entire team. By expressing his interest in the individuals, he was learning about each person which eased communication with openness and trust.

Step 3: Observe, Affirm and Ask - Find out the Individuals Motivation

Once there is an established method of communication between a manager and employee, Ask!

One small business manager I coached said he blatantly asked his employees “why do you come to work?” While this is better than never asking the question, you may not get the complete answer. To best ask the individual what motivates them at work, take note of what you observe the employee doing well and affirm them. Then ask why they are so motivated. Ask them “what drives you to do this so well?”

For example, Kate, a former employee I supervised, was fantastic at cleaning the facility throughout the day. I told her that the facility looks organized and welcoming. I said, “not many people have taken your initiative, why do you take care of it so well?” She responded by saying she likes to have an environment that she enjoys and, by taking care of it throughout the day, it alleviated her work at the end of the day so she doesn’t have to stay late.

Kate was driven to create an environment that she enjoyed and found that she could control the time she left for home by increasing her work load during the day. As a supervisor, I then knew that a motivating reward would be a flexible schedule or to simply get off work early. If I had not asked the question, I would not have known the best way to reward and motivate Kate.

A common error of supervisors is to assume that they know an individuals motivation or simply assume the individual’s motivations are the same as their own. By observing, affirming, and asking employees directly, we learn a tremendous amount that is helpful in guiding people towards a common goal.

The small business manager I mentioned earlier told me he cared deeply for his employees, but was uncomfortable giving such positive affirmation because he thought it might make them less productive. While that could happen in unique cases, the manager that takes the time to observe, affirm and ask will be in no danger of lost productivity over the long term.

All individuals have motivations and personal self interests. Individuals usually have several and they may vary upon the given time period, job or circumstance. Therefore it is critical to continually build and maintain relationships to identify an employee’s current motivation. Build in time during regular meetings to create an ongoing process that ensures retention of valuable employees and rolls the organization toward success.

Step 4: Align Goals - Match the project outcome with employee motivation

Teams and organizations move toward success best when all members have something at stake. While some employees may feel motivated to give their best effort for the good of the whole and the success of the organization, it is naive to think that this is a sustainable and primary motivation for the entire team.

The 'best of the best' employees tend to be creative, innovative and initiators. By following the previous three steps you understand your own motivation and of those around you. You are now in a position to access and maximize these resources in your organization by intersecting the individual's motivation with the organization's goals.

For example, Carl's self interest in position and respect will be highly motivated if his project receives high visibility. Carl knows that with visibility, a successful transition will elevate his status in the organization and make him more likely to receive a promotion in the future. Again, giving Carl accolades for his work and placing him in a public position of leadership will fulfill his self-interest of position and respect while the organization experiences a successful transition.

Kate, on the other hand would love a schedule change to enable her to leave work early. This may be a very viable perk to offer Kate if she is asked to take a lead role in a new program.

The culminating outcome of HBSAA's Steps to Success is to directly associate the successful completion of the organization's goals with the individual motivations and self-interest.

Unlike the finest automobile, human behavior is dynamic and changing. Employees are not designed to operate and act alike. Fortunately for the health and livelihood of organizations and business, humans have the capacity for innovative creations and top performance. Our greatest opportunities will come as we access and maximize the human energy that exists within ourselves and those around us.

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