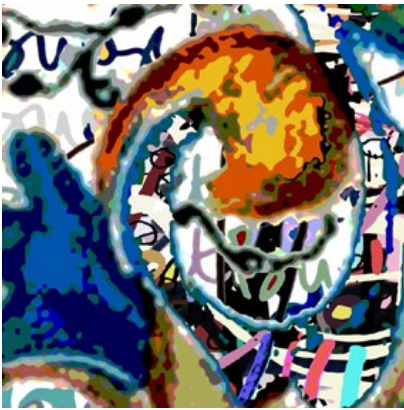




Motivational springboards for your workforce

Adapt your motivation strategy to individual personalities



Didier Avril, série Storytelling

Our sources

This synopsis is based on the publications presented below and on the back page.

The Enthusiastic Employee

David Sirota,
Louis A. Mischkind, Michael Irwin Meltzer,
Wharton School Publishing, 2005,
266 pages.

La motivation au travail – Modèles et stratégies

[Motivation at Work – Models and Strategies] Claude Levy-Leboyer,
Les Éditions d'Organisation,
2006, 245 pages.

Companies have long been aware that motivation affects the way people perform and have therefore endeavored to develop effective strategies to keep them happy and productive. To this end, a wide variety of incentive systems – performance-linked bonuses, employee-of-the-month awards, profit-sharing plans, etc. – was developed, but the long-term results of these efforts have been sorely disappointing.

A critical eye was then cast upon systems that relied upon "extrinsic" motivation, that is, upon the promise of reward in exchange for a given outcome. Indeed, in a context where employees are expected to do more than just execute orders and where performance is measured in a decreasingly objective manner, this approach often proves to be inadequate. Initiatives were then focused on developing "internal" motivation, i.e. making work intrinsically attractive for employees.

However, the fact is that even the best motivational strategy won't inspire every employee. The publications we have selected underline the

highly complex nature of motivation, which springs from different sources depending on the individual, the context and the moment. They offer some valuable insights for managers looking for effective ways to motivate their subordinates:

- **Define motivating goals, i.e. which people believe are worth the effort to attain, but which they also perceive as being attainable.**
- **Work hard to sustain motivation over time: to perform well, people must furnish an initial burst of energy, but more importantly must persevere in the face of adversity.**

In this synopsis...

- 1 A complex phenomenon
- 2 Define motivating goals
- 3 Maintain the momentum

1 A complex phenomenon

Consider two employees with seemingly similar skills, experience and qualities. Employee A simply “does his/her job,” fulfilling his/her perceived obligations, and no more. With time, his/her performance declines and he/she must be regularly reminded of what is expected of him/her. Employee B is deeply committed, continuously tries to improve his/her performance, proposes solutions to resolve problems and keep them from recurring, suggests innovations, exceeds customer expectations, and works autonomously. The contribution of B is incomparably higher than that of A, although they both appear to have the same basic strengths to succeed in their jobs. So what explains the huge difference between the two?

Very often, motivation is what makes the difference. Indeed, motivation determines the effort that an individual is willing to make to achieve a goal. Without motivation, people lack the energy to tackle a challenging goal, and more importantly, to persevere in the face of the inevitable hitches and fatigue.

Companies therefore naturally rival one another in finding creative ways to motivate their employees. In the early twentieth century, Taylor’s scientific mass production method was based on the principle that it is possible to achieve significant gains in performance by dividing tasks and stimulating each worker to reach an objective easy to measure and visualize – produce X units in a day. Indeed, this method was very effective at first. However, the negative side effects of this mind-numbing system rapidly became apparent. Toward the second half of the 20th century, Maslow, Herzberg and others gave birth to new incentive strategies by making corporate leaders aware that many employees expected more from their work than a simple exchange of labor for money. They highlighted a hierarchy of needs, in which increasingly sophisticated needs emerge when more basic needs are satisfied. Thus, according to Maslow, once people receive sufficient wages to secure their physiological needs – food

and housing, they begin to feel other needs successively – safety, social interaction, then self-esteem and finally self-realization. To motivate employees on a lasting basis, companies must therefore be able to satisfy these needs as they evolve. These theories gave rise to the “human relations” movement, in which companies motivate people by enriching their tasks, providing training, encouraging collaborative management, etc. – all measures designed to satisfy higher-level needs.

However, no one would deny that we are now going through what Claude Levy-Leboyer calls a “motivation crisis.” Even executives, who were traditionally very motivated, underlines

One-size-fits-all incentive systems are generally ineffective in sustaining motivation over the long term.

François Dupuy in the *La fatigue des élites* [The Fatigue of the Elite], are demotivated as never before.

Part of the reason is linked to the changing relationship between individuals and their employers and work in general. First of all, work is perceived less and less as a value in itself and plays a diminishing role in the life of individuals, who start their careers later, who stop working long before the end of their lives, who work shorter hours and who spend more time on activities not related to work. Moreover, the rising precariousness of the labor market has led many employees to think once again essentially in terms of work for wages. These individuals consequently look outside work to fulfill their “higher level” needs – in their leisure-time activities, social interactions, volunteer work, etc. In this context, is it really so surprising to note their lack of enthusiasm in their jobs?

However, another underlying factor is the fact that company motivational policies often take insufficient account of the complexity of the phenomenon of motivation:

A multitude of factors

Most motivational strategies attempt to identify the most decisive factors in order to address them first. However,

research shows that motivation is a fragile balance that does not depend on the fulfillment of any one essential component, but rather an entire set of factors. For example, an employee who works enthusiastically, adheres to company goals, gets along with the boss, and is generally very satisfied will nonetheless experience a drop in motivation if he/she experiences sustained conflict with close colleagues or if he/she is refused an expected promotion. The authors of *The Enthusiastic Employee* indeed highlight three categories of expectations that must each be satisfied for employees to feel truly satisfied in their jobs: fair treatment, a sense of achievement and camaraderie (Figure A). 45% of employees who feel that all of these three conditions have been fulfilled state they are “very satisfied” with their work, compared to only 8% of those for whom only one of these conditions is met. Motivation also depends on factors particular to each individual and context – rather than on an overall perception of satisfaction. Some people are satisfied without being particularly motivated, whereas others may be very motivated by their jobs, even though they are unhappy with certain aspects of their work. Hoping to find a simple key driver that can trigger motivation in every circumstance is therefore illusory.

A matter of perception

What is more, people do not derive their motivation from objective factors, but rather from their individual perception of their experience. For example, when employees are given a new project, some will see this as a sign of respect and trust and will be energized, while others will interpret this as extra work that is not compensated by additional pay, and will become less motivated. Similarly, a bonus can be experienced by one individual as a reward, and by another as a way to avoid raising his/her salary or to hide the lack of advancement opportunities, etc. In consequence, the success of any motivational strategy closely depends on how people perceive it.

An unstable state

The success of a given motivational strategy is never assured once and

for all, because motivation is cyclical. Our needs change constantly, either because new needs replace old ones as soon as they are satisfied, or because we compare our situation with that of those around us, causing new expectations to emerge. The way in which we perceive our environment also depends on our mood, the context, the influence of those around us, etc. In addition, we tend to be more motivated when we feel that our efforts are sufficiently rewarded: if we have the impression that our efforts are bringing us closer to the desired goal, our motivation strengthens, but if we have the feeling that we are “just spinning our wheels,” it is likely to flag rapidly. In consequence, motivational strategies must be continuously maintained and updated.

Major differences depending on individual personalities

Most companies base their motivational strategies on the belief that all employees have similar needs. However, nothing could be further from the truth, especially in today’s increasingly

diversified business environment. Many psychologists have developed personality models showing that individuals are motivated by notably different factors (Figure B). Despite these observations, many companies bet on a very small number of key drivers, and sometimes only one, e.g. the promise of promotion or higher pay, pride in belonging to a reputed organization, or adhesion to the company mission, etc. But using a single motivational model tends to exclude those who do not spontaneously share these aspirations. Those who feel an immediate “connection” with the selected incentive strategy are extremely motivated, while the rest are left by the wayside. Companies can develop more effective customized motivational strategies by taking personality differences into account.

In this context, local managers have an essential role to play in motivating their subordinates. From their interactions with individuals, they should be able to identify the specific aspirations of various team members, influence their perception of events, perceive

their motivational ups and downs and respond appropriately when they get discouraged.

We shall see that managers must take two types of action:

- Help their subordinates define motivating goals that justify the effort required for their attainment;
- Encourage their subordinates to persevere in the face of adversity until these goals are reached.

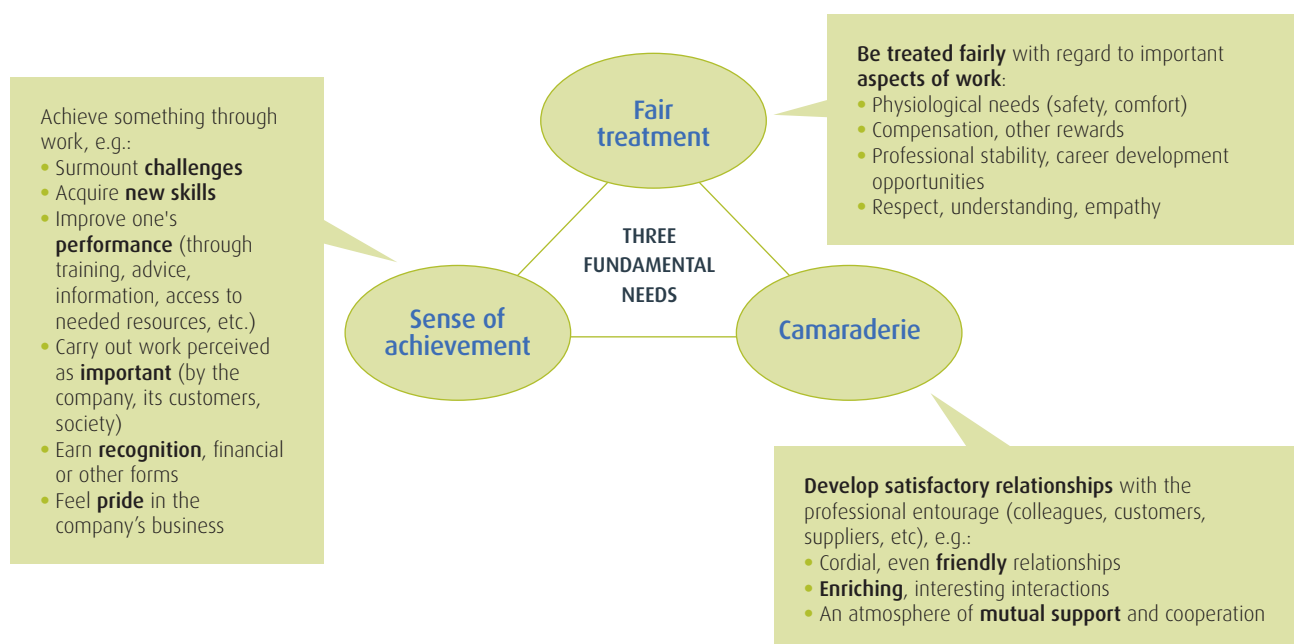
2 Define motivating goals

An essential prerequisite for motivation is to understand the reasons we act as we do. Various studies have shown that the more clearly people are able to articulate their objectives, the greater their chances that they will make significant efforts to attain them.

Managers can thus contribute to motivating their subordinates by helping them define – or assigning them – goals that push them into action. To be an effective driver of motivation,

FIGURE A Trois registres d’attentes fondamentales

Les études menées pendant plus de 10 ans par Sirota Consulting auprès des salariés de plus de 200 organisations publiques et privées, en Amérique du Nord mais aussi en Europe et dans le reste du monde, ont mis en évidence que trois dimensions sont nécessaires pour qu’un salarié soit satisfait et motivé par son travail.



Based on *The Enthusiastic Employee*, David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind, Michael Irwin Meltzer, Wharton School Publishing, 2005.

such goals must fulfill two conditions (Figure C):

- Be perceived as being worth the effort to attain: the more valued the desired outcome, the more motivated people will be to achieve it;
- Be attainable: A goal that has very little chance of being achieved will be less motivating than an objective that people believe they can reach if they try hard enough.

► A goal that is worth the effort to attain

Managers must know their team well enough to be able to translate their responsibilities and the company

objectives into a form that will inspire action:

Emphasize dimensions valued by each individual

To motivate people, managers must recognize the diversity of the expectations and values of different individuals and be careful not to project their own expectations on others! Take the example of a seemingly simple goal: a sales turnover objective for salespeople. The apparent simplicity of this objective masks a much more complex reality: some will be motivated by the prospect of a bonus if the objective is reached, others will be more driven by the idea of

tackling a challenge or competing with the other members of the sales force, others by the feeling of team success, still others by the pride in contributing to company performance or satisfying their boss's expectations, etc.

These values are not always conscious. So, not only must managers have deep discussions with subordinates to understand what really motivates them, but also carefully observe them in order to identify their subconscious motives. Indeed, employees may commonly accept an objective presented as "natural" – hoping for a promotion, for example – although it may not correspond to their profound aspirations. The reactions of individual employees

FIGURE B Varied aspirations

Edgar Schein, researcher at MIT, has shown that the sources of motivation vary significantly from one individual to the next. Managers must thus be very familiar with their subordinates in order to create conditions likely to stimulate their desire to become fully engaged.

VALUED ASPECTS OF WORK	MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO COMMUNICATE	MOST EFFECTIVE REWARDS
Technical or functional skill	Show them that you value their expertise. Demonstrate that you are also familiar with the subject to establish your credibility.	Offer them opportunities to develop their expertise: training programs, conferences, participation in pilot projects or cross-company teams, etc.
Managerial skill	Show them how their performance contributes to overall performance. Ask them for their opinion on general management issues.	If you cannot offer them desired raises or promotions, offer opportunities to enrich their work: expand their scope of responsibility or propose varied assignments.
Autonomy and independence	Agree on objectives and a calendar for your interactions and try to leave them alone at other times.	Entrust them with autonomous assignments.
Autonomy and independence	Agree on objectives and a calendar for your interactions and try to leave them alone at other times.	Entrust them with autonomous assignments.
Stability and security	Plan specific times to communicate on issues that are bothering you: reassure them; take the initiative to "defuse" rumors. Remind them that they must work to develop themselves continuously, as they might not naturally recognize the need to do so.	Show them that you appreciate their loyalty.
Creativity, entrepreneurial opportunities	Listen to their ideas. Ask them which projects they would prefer to take on. Involve them in brainstorming sessions.	Give them visible signs that you appreciate what they do (bonuses, titles, official recognition). Entrust them with responsibility for projects that they have initiated.
Sense of service	Propose ambitious and stimulating objectives. Raise the bar if a task seems too easy to them.	Continue to offer them new challenges as it is the most concrete sign that you value their achievements.
Challenge	Proposez-leur des objectifs ambitieux et stimulants. Rehaussez-les si la tâche leur semble trop facile.	Continuez à leur proposer de nouveaux défis : c'est la meilleure preuve que vous valorisez leurs réalisations.
Lifestyle	Be clear about your expectations: define the job clearly, explain how objectives will be rewarded if attained and what will happen if they are not attained.	Give them sufficient flexibility to manage their work schedule, offer additional days off.

Based on *Speak to What Drives Them*, Harvard Management Communication Letter, September 2003.

must be observed attentively to detect such gaps.

Offer a certain degree of challenge

Several psychologists have shown that a challenging goal tends to motivate people more than a goal that is easily achieved, because a greater sense of satisfaction is gained from overcoming difficulties. This is why vague objectives, such as “do your best” are not particularly motivating. It also explains why people actually become de-motivated when tasks are oversimplified in an attempt to improve productivity and make their lives easier.

Specify what people can expect in return

The more clearly employees identify what they can expect in return for their efforts, the greater the chances that they will be motivated. These benefits can take the form of “rewards” allocated by the boss for the achievement of specific goals. For example, bonuses, pay raises, promotions, official marks of recognition, signs of respect, development opportunities, etc., represent forms of recognition that can be very energizing. This is the principle behind many incentive systems, such as contests or merit-based bonuses. For such programs to work, the corresponding rules must be clearly defined, in terms of how performance will be measured, over what timeframe and what type of reward will be offered, so that expected return will be perceived as worth the

investment. For such reward systems to be a credible driver of motivation, it is also essential that they truly be allocated according to performance. Indeed, an undeserved bonus can be extremely destructive to the subsequent motivation of the concerned employee.

But here again, companies must be careful not to apply one-size-fits-all measures. It is well known that motivation is strongest when it comes from within, that is, when people have the feeling that they are the ones who decide whether or not to make an effort. For example, performance-based compensation can be counter-productive

Motivation starts with the impulse of a stimulating goal.

with employees who already find their work intrinsically motivating, if this gives them the feeling they are being manipulated. It is sometimes more effective to focus efforts on making work more intrinsically stimulating, by enriching tasks, giving people more autonomy, etc. (Figure D). Rewards can still be granted once the objective is attained, at which time employees are more likely to see them as a sign of recognition and encouragement, without denying their autonomy.

► A goal that is attainable

For a goal to be motivating, it must also be perceived as realistic. Indeed, people tend to be more motivated when they feel that their efforts have

an impact on the desired outcome, and that this goal can be reached. Managers must therefore take care to ensure that employees feel capable of attaining their objectives:

Make sure that objectives are accepted

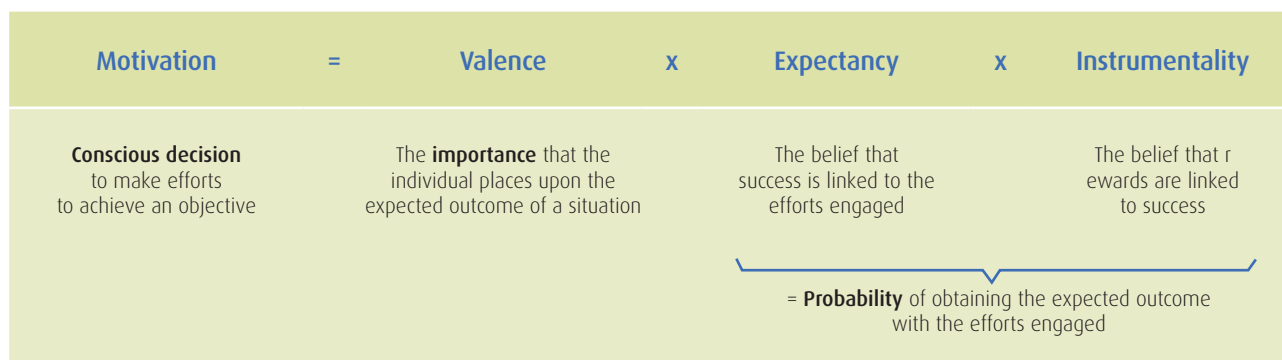
What determines employee engagement and motivation is not so much the degree to which individuals participate in selecting and developing their own objectives as their willing acceptance of these goals. Managers must consequently take the time to convince people of the validity of these objectives, rather than just tell them what to do. People must be convinced that the established goals are important – for the organization, customers, shareholders and other company stakeholders, their team, their colleagues, etc. Employees must also be reassured that they will be able to attain the goal in question. Objectives tend to have more weight if managers use logical arguments to demonstrate their feasibility, by breaking them down, showing current progress, citing similar success stories, etc. Managers can also use their personal experience and legitimacy to support their belief in the attainability of these objectives.

Define specific objectives with visible timelines

The more vague and remote a goal, the less motivating it tends to be, because employees cannot easily perceive how to reach it and how to

FIGURE C The impact of goals on motivation

In the sixties, Victor Vroom showed that a correlation exists between the effort devoted to carry out a task or learn something and three components of motivation:



measure progress. It is therefore advised to break down a general, distant goal into concrete short- or medium-term objectives that will be more easily perceived as attainable. For example, asking someone to “develop a strategic vision” is too abstract to push him or her into action. A more stimulating approach would be to reformulate this objective as “identify the main factors of uncertainty on a given market and propose an action plan to deal with them within six months.”

Make sure that employees have the means to achieve their goals

Lastly, nothing is less motivating than a goal over which one has no control. When employees have the feeling that their efforts don't have much influence on the attainment of their objectives, they are not particularly motivated. In such situations, managers can often help their subordinates take things into hand, in particular by ensuring that they have the resources and information required to succeed. Support can also be offered in the form of advice and concrete assistance with specific aspects of the job.

3 Maintain the momentum

Performance depends not only on the initial commitment to attain a goal, but also and more importantly on the ability to persevere in the face of the inevitable setbacks and fatigue.

In regular contact with employees, managers play an essential role in identifying the risks of “declining momentum” and consequently in finding ways to keep people motivated:

Give feedback on performance

People will continue to be committed to realizing a goal only if they receive feedback on how far they have come, as well as how far they still need to go. This information is needed to stay motivated, since seeing progress tells people whether their efforts have been efficient, and whether or not they should bother to continue. At the same time, visualizing what remains to be done makes it possible to set new intermediate goals, and thus to create new impetus for action. To keep people energized, managers must consequently give objective performance

feedback if possible, e.g. sales volume, productivity, rate of defects, customer satisfaction survey results, etc. Still, statistical data cannot replace qualitative feedback, especially when performance is not quantifiable. Establishing an assessment scale and keeping track of progress can effectively compensate for the fact that employees often have trouble assessing their own performance objectively.

Ensure fair treatment

A major cause of de-motivation is the feeling of unfair treatment, not only with regard to compensation but also working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and recognition from superiors. Several studies have shown that people subconsciously tend to adapt their performance according to what they believe to be fair. Thus, in one experiment, workmen made to believe that they were overpaid greatly accelerated their pace, whereas those made to believe that they were underpaid slowed down. In the same way, employees whose performance is judged by their superiors to be poor tend to do worse, while those seen as above average try to do even better. In

FIGURE D Make work more intrinsically motivating

Hackman and Oldman identified five characteristics of work which can often be used to increase “intrinsic” motivation:

ENRICHMENT FACTORS	IMPLEMENTATION TIPS
Variety = Combat monotony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of different activities • Call upon a range of skills
Task identity = See the outcome of one's work because it is a "whole" piece of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group tasks in order to make the outcome visible to the individual who carries them out • If possible, try to identify sets of tasks that a single employee can carry out from end to end
Task significance = Perceive the value of one's work beyond the simple realization of tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the contribution of the work of a given individual to the overall company performance • Demonstrate the value of accomplished work for society as a whole
Autonomy = Be allowed freedom in organizing one's efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the limits within which an employee is allowed to make decisions and organize his or her work
Feedback = Be able to assess one's performance with regard to expended efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate information on performance that is precise and simple to understand • Provide regular feedback

general, employees who feel they are unjustly treated will tend to contribute less in accordance with their perceived low level of recognition.

The sense of fair treatment is linked to two main factors:

- Consistency of treatment within the company, and more particularly within the team, in comparison to a market “standard” and to the prior experience of the concerned individuals;
- The possibility to openly discuss the methods used to assess work and calculate compensation.

Managers must pay specific attention to these points if they want to keep their subordinates motivated.

Offer assistance suited to individual personality types

Although motivation is not a personality feature, certain character traits have a decisive impact on the aptitude to persevere in the face of adversity. For instance, people who have a good self-image are often less quick to feel discouraged than those who lack confidence. Likewise, some people tend to think that they can influence what happens to them, while others have a greater tendency to feel controlled by events. The former are better armed

to respond to adversity. When dealing with employees who become easily discouraged for lack of self-confidence or a fatalistic attitude toward events, managers are advised to make long-term efforts to help these individuals

People must do more than commit to a goal; they must persevere until it is attained.

develop more positive attitudes, by pointing out their successes, showing them different ways to react to situations they perceive to be out of their hands, etc.

Beyond these few fundamental factors, one should be aware that people react to adversity in very different ways depending on their individual personality (Figure E). Managers will consequently be all the more effective in keeping their subordinates motivated if they know how to adapt to individual personality types. For example, anxiety-prone employees may need managers to act like “buddies” in helping them find solutions. Other more aggressive types prefer managers to recognize their abilities and make suggestions that are more factual and to the point. Still others are easily depressed, and need a sympathetic ear, etc. All of

these types of personalities are able to respond to challenging situations, but their reaction will be triggered by different factors.

• • • •

Motivation is thus a complex phenomenon that cannot be addressed with one magic formula. Local managers must play an essential role in identifying the motivational drivers likely to speak to various individuals and providing support that is most suited to the contexts and personality types involved.

FIGURE E A personality model

The authors of *Manager selon les personnalités [Personality-Based Management]* defined a taxonomy of personalities to help managers identify appropriate ways to support their subordinates. In particular, it is important to understand how different people tend to react to stress to select a suitable strategy to revive their motivation when it begins to flag.

SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO STRESS	DO'S	DON'TS
Anxiety (flight, denial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much like a colleague would do, help people find solutions on their own • Be collaborative and friendly with people, while remaining sufficiently firm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order people around (force them to make commitments, make decisions for them) • Judge, moralize • Lose your calm (threaten, get visibly upset, punish)
Aggressiveness (anger, struggle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize people's abilities • Suggest possible solutions • Use logic and factual arguments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominate people (challenge, blame, tell them to “be reasonable”) • Lack conviction (vague, hesitant, unassertive)
Depression (inhibition, inertia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen with empathy • Reassure people about their qualities • Accompany and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply tell people to “get a grip on themselves” without assistance • Tell them to “just grin and bear it”

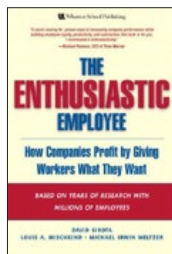
Based on *Manager selon les personnalités [Personality-Based Management]*, Jacques Fradin, Frédéric Le Moulec, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2006.

Our selection

To find the best ideas on this subject, we recommend the following publications:

The Enthusiastic Employee

David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind, Michael Irwin Meltzer, Wharton School Publishing, 2005.



This book reviews a decade of qualitative studies of over two million employees at several hundred public and private organizations in every possible industry, primarily in North America, but also in Europe and the rest of the world. According to these studies, three fundamental conditions must be met for the vast majority of employees to feel satisfied at work:

- Fair treatment,
- A sense of achievement,
- Camaraderie.

Based on these conclusions, the authors propose many suggestions on how to meet these employee satisfaction and motivation criteria.

La motivation au travail – Modèles et stratégies

[Motivation at Work – Models and Strategies], Claude Levy-Leboyer, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2006.



The author of this book presents an effective and easily accessible overview of existing motivation theories for managers and executives. Although it does not claim to have found "the" answer to the question of employee motivation, this book offers many interesting perspectives that can be useful in exploring possible solutions, both in terms of understanding the sometimes surprising reactions of employees, and adapting the incentive strategy in appropriate ways. Readers are also likely to find this book personally beneficial in helping them gain a better grasp of their own aspirations and behavior.

And also...

We also relied on the following publications:

- **Getting a handle on employee motivation**, HBS Working Knowledge, 2003. (Article available at <http://hbswk.hbs.edu>)
Adapt your management style to the specific aspirations of each employee.
- **Stop de-motivating your employees**, Harvard Management Update, 2006. (Article on sale at www.hbsp.harvard.edu)
Practical advice to increase the satisfaction and motivation of your employees.
- **Why incentive plans cannot work**, Harvard Business Review, 1993. (Article on sale at www.hbsp.harvard.edu)
The limitations of motivation systems founded on extrinsic rewards.
- **La fatigue des élites [The Fatigue of the Elite]**, François Dupuy, Editions du Seuil et La République des Idées, 2005. (Book)
An essay on the steadily declining motivation of executives.
- **Manager selon les personnalités [Personality-Based Management]**, Jacques Fradin, Frédéric Le Moullec, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2006. (Book)
Understand individual personality differences to motivate your subordinates more effectively.

Further readings

To explore this topic further:

- **Re- motiver le travail [Re-Motivate Work]**
Claude Levy-Leboyer, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2007.
- **Making work more meaningful (Manageris synopsis 148a)**
Motivate employees by giving more meaning to their work.
- **Rally people around a vision (Manageris synopsis 123a)**
Design and disseminate a compelling vision.

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