

Editorial

Javier Bajer

Honestly, what motivates people to work?

It is quite likely that you and I were brainwashed when in 1943 Maslow “revealed” the secrets of human motivation.

Of course, we all agree that our physiological needs must come first (we can't get much done if we are starving or tired). But building an entire hierarchy under the pinnacle of self-actualisation has not really worked.

Today, not many people wake up in the morning with a smile in their face as they rush to work. Instead, most fight a work-life balance, thinking of the time till the next vacation (from the Latin *vacare*, “be unoccupied”).

I still remember the unquestionable WIIFM (What's In It for Me) mantra. The idea behind it was that people are only motivated by what they get. Give them what they want and they'll do what you want.

As a consequence, we needed to build a world with complex perks and reward systems so that we could exchange these for commitment, effort and years of service. We ended up rewarding obedience, resilience and loyalty, using a plethora of snake oil type of “solutions” that promised to “engage” people once and for all.

Honestly, this wasn't a problem then. But the problem now is that our needs have dramatically changed. If we are looking for agility, drive, empowerment, courage, teamwork or customer-centricity, we won't find them under the WIIFM carpet.

Thank God for the arrival of neurosciences, which reveals what truly motivates us at work. We now know that we work better (and more efficiently, collaboratively and creatively) when we put our time and talents to good use, knowing we can add value to others (aka customers).

In essence, Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells only half of the story. Once we are able to stand on our own feet, sustainable motivation will only come from the value we try to create for others. It is only then when we are able to focus on what matters, reducing unproductive efforts and feeling, to Maslow's disappointment, that we are better when we look outside.

The irony, we also end up doing better this way.

Warm regards,

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