



Psychology Today



“Your need for answers may make you share when a patient or friend wants you to listen.”

Mark Banschick, M.D.

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Who We Are

New ways of thinking about people
by Steven Reiss, Ph.D.

How to Motivate Workers

Motivation in Business

Published on October 21, 2012 by Steven Reiss, Ph.D. in Who We Are

We have constructed a new, comprehensive understanding of human motivation that is attracting interest from the business community. At the moment, more than 1,000 business consultants use our methods. A small but growing number of multinational companies use our methods for human resources. They adopted them after detailed internal evaluations. We have created eight training institutes globally to teach these methods and ensure quality control.

We have identified 16 basic desires, or 16 human needs. All psychologically important motives appear to be combinations of these 16. They include such diverse goals as acceptance, eating, order, power, status, and tranquility. (For a full list, see my previous blog, 16 human needs, July, 2009). Everybody embraces all 16, but people prioritize them differently. How an individual prioritizes the 16 basic desires is called a "Reiss Profile."

We define motivation as the assertion of core values. We are a species motivated to assert our core values. If we learn somebody's values, we know how to motivate them. If we know how to motivate them, we can usually guess at least some of their core values. We ignore definitions of motivation as energy or drive. We reject as invalid the definition of motivation as a predisposition to behavior. Motives actually predispose people to opposite behaviors or traits, depending on valuations.

We follow a two-step process to motivate employees or executives. First, the individual completes the corporate version of the Reiss Motivation Profile. This is a 128-item, standardized questionnaire that evaluates how the individual prioritizes 16 basic human needs. One employee, for example, might give high priority to power, another to status, and a still another to understanding (curiosity). The results show what motivates the individual and how those motives are connected to the individual's values and traits.

Once you know what motivates an employee -- once you know the "Reiss Profile" -- typically you can predict how this individual will react to many work situations. A person with a low priority for honor, for example, is motivated by self-interest, and will jump to a better job should one come along. A person with low tranquility is motivated by adventure and will tend to take risks, while a person with high tranquility is motivated by safety and will tend to adopt a much more cautious approach.

People tend to flourish in jobs that express their core values, as revealed by their Reiss Profile. A highly curious employee might be naturally motivated in an engineering job or job for creating software or strategy or scientific study. A highly competitive person might be motivated in any position that requires intense competition. A person with high need for status requires a prestigious jobs, but one with a low need requires a non-prestigious job.

To motivate employees generally, you need to help them connect their work to their values. In other words, you have to value something in order to be motivated to do it. For employees who work to support their family, for example, it might be motivating for them to keep this important link in mind. For those who are motivated by status, they might think of the ways in which their job makes them feel important and respected.

The methods of 16 basic desires are arguably the best validated scientific

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theory of what motivates a person. This is the only empirically derived taxonomy of human needs. The desires are correlated to Big 5 Personality traits. The motives predict real-world behaviors. They have extraordinary applicability, explaining relationships, sports motivation, and school motivation. I am finishing a book that shows how religion is organized to address these specific 16 basic desires.




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