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# Reading Room

Because today's business leaders need to be well read

- Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders**  
By John Baldoni  
McGraw Hill (2005)

## Excerpt

### Motivation Secrets

By all rights, they were done. Deep inside enemy territory, their putative leader dead, they should all have been slaughtered. But it didn't work out that way because their nominal leader, Cyrus the Younger, a Persian prince, was not their real leader. Their genuine leader, Xenophon, a Greek general, was one of their own, respected, trusted, and elected.

The Greeks were superior fighters, both tactically and technologically. They knew how to fight as a team, and their swords and shields were uniquely adapted for

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their phalanx warfare. They also possessed the most salient edge of all: leadership. Xenophon, like all Greek commanders, led from the front; he was seen in the thick of combat, never flinching, always seeming to do the right thing. Amazingly, Xenophon returned with the majority of the Ten Thousand, incurring few casualties in war, but losing some to weather and treacherous terrain in the mountains. Historian Victor Davis Hanson attributes Xenophon's success to the superior Greek culture-not superior in a racial sense, but superior in the sense of what we today would call shared values, common purpose, and genuine leadership.

Two millennia and four hundred years later, another disaster morphed into rebirth. Malden Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, caught fire and burned to the ground. The smart business decision for the owner would have been to take the nearly \$300 million in insurance money and retire; he was in his seventies, after all, and the few textile manufacturers remaining in his area were looking for any excuse to leave New England, not to stay. But not Aaron Feuerstein. Immediately after the fire, he pledged to rebuild the plant that made the popular Polartec fleece. In addition, he said that he would keep all employees on the payroll during the reconstruction. Feuerstein was hailed as a hero and received acclaim far and wide. He took this in stride, saying that he had just done the right thing. It was not the right thing financially; the costs of meeting the payroll and reconstruction exceeded the insurance settlement.

A few years later, Feuerstein found himself in financial straits, and this time the employees returned the favor. They foreswore overtime and settled for lower wages in an effort to keep the plant running. It was a classic example of leadership begetting leadership. In October 2003, Malden Mills emerged from bankruptcy.

Motivation is one of those topics about which much is preached with little result. The reason is simple: Leaders do not motivate-not directly, anyway. They do it indirectly. Motivation is an intrinsic response; it comes from inside and cannot be imposed from the outside. Motivation comes from wanting to do something of one's own free will. If you are free, you can choose to do something. Take the Greeks under Xenophon. They chose him as their general. Why? Because they believed that he had the right combination of skills and talents to lead them into battle and, as circumstances would have it, out of battle, too. The same holds for the employees at Malden Mills. While they had no say in the choice of Feuerstein as CEO, they did have a choice when it came to negotiating for a pay raise. They chose to accept lower wages because they perceived that it was in the company's best interests, as well as their own, to make a short-term sacrifice for a long-term gain.

Both the Greeks and the employees were motivated to do what they did. To turn the situation on its head, Xenophon could have compelled the soldiers to follow him through force-after all, that was the way things were done in the Persian army and in the army of Alexander the Great a century later-but it is doubtful that compulsion of this sort would have

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led so many men to safety; instead, one by one, they would have drifted away to fend for themselves. Likewise, at Malden Mills, Feuerstein could have insisted on getting a better wage deal, but he did not; the union members accepted lower wages of their own accord, thereby avoiding acrimony and building upon the loyalty Feuerstein had shown them earlier when he rebuilt the burned-out facility.

The short answer is leadership. Leadership is about getting things done the right way; to do that, you need people. To get people to follow you, you need to have them trust you. And if you want them to trust you and do things for you and the organization, they need to be motivated. Motivation is purely and simply a leadership behavior. It stems from wanting to do what is right for people as well as for the organization. If we consider leadership to be an action, motivation, too, is an active process. And if you go deep enough, motivation itself is driven by a series of actions grouped under three headings: energize, encourage and exhort.

### **Energize**

Energize is what leaders do when they set the right example, communicate clearly, and challenge appropriately.

*Exemplify.* Motivation starts with a good example. Leaders who hope to motivate must reflect the vision, mission, and culture of the organization they lead. What they do says more about who they are as leaders than what they say. The example they set will be the one that others follow. The leader who preaches the value of teamwork and volunteers to help out teams in need is demonstrating the right example.

*Communicate.* Communication is central to leadership; it includes how the leader speaks, listens, and learns. The leader who wishes to motivate must communicate a vision and a mission and follow up to check for understanding. People need to know what to do, but they also need to know that their leaders are listening. Motivation can occur only if two-way communications occur.

*Challenge.* People like to be challenged. Leaders who tap into this need can achieve powerful goals because they will be linking those goals with the fulfillment of desires. The hard part of crafting a challenge is to focus on what is attainable in ways that are energizing and exciting and play upon people's imagination and creativity.

### **Encourage**

Encourage is what leaders do to support the process of motivation through empowerment, coaching, and recognition.

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*Empower.* Leaders soon learn that their real power comes from others. It is by unleashing the individual talents and skills of other people that they can achieve their intended results. The release of this collective energy can occur only if the leader grants people the responsibility and authority to act. Empowerment becomes a powerful motivational tool because it puts people in control of their own destinies.

*Coach.* It is a leader's responsibility to provide people with the right support to do their job. The bedrock of that support can be found in the relationship between manager and employee. The best way to nurture that relationship is through frequent and regular one-on-one coaching sessions. Coaching provides the opportunity for the leader to get to know the employee as a person and how she can help the employee achieve personal and organizational goals. Coaching also begins the process of creating the next generation of leaders.

*Recognize.* The need for recognition is paramount. Recognition may be the single most powerful reason that people work, aside from income. It is fundamental to our humanity that we want people to recognize what we do and how we do it. When people are recognized, they become motivated; they want to do the work, and they want to do it well.

## Exhort

Exhorting is how leaders create an experience based on sacrifice and inspiration that prepares the ground upon which motivation can flourish.

*Sacrifice.* The truest measure of service is sacrifice, putting the needs of others ahead of your own. When employees see their leaders put other people first and do it by putting aside their own ambitions, they learn to trust their leaders. Sacrifice is a form of commitment to others.

*Inspire.* Motivation really comes down to inspiration. Since motivation comes from within, it is a form of self-inspiration.

## The Facts on Motivation

The need for motivation is very real. In his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida describes those who use their knowledge to create something new and different as members of the "creative class," a group that includes some 38 million people. Using survey data gathered in 2001 by an IT newsweekly, Florida identified a number of factors that influence motivation at work for IT professionals. Money was a factor, but it ranked fourth,

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behind challenge, flexibility, and stability. Of the respondents, 67 percent said that they wanted "challenge and responsibility" in the workplace, 53 percent sought flexibility, 43.5 percent wanted stability, and 38.5 percent said that base pay was important. Other key factors noted by more than 20 percent of the respondents were job atmosphere, casual attire, training, contribution to success, and recognition.

While Florida's research pertains to IT professionals, and by extension to other creatives, the lessons from it pertain to anyone who manages bright, knowledgeable, and talented employees. You need to develop a work environment that offers challenges, grants responsibility, and offers a degree of flexibility as well as an opportunity for growth and development and recognition. All of these factors are in addition to pay. When these factors are not present, workers become dissatisfied, and their interest and subsequent productivity decline. They also will look for opportunities to leave, thereby wasting the organization's investment in their training and development.

Has there ever been a greater need for managers to create a desirable, hospitable, productive work environment in which employees can find challenges and be rewarded financially, emotionally, and psychically? Motivation is not something that's nice to do. It's a must-do, but it's a must-do that pays dividends for all who participate.

### **Motivation Planner**

Motivation, to paraphrase General Dwight Eisenhower, is about getting other people to do something because they want to do it. Use the following questions to assess your situation and how you might begin to create conditions in which people would feel more motivated.

Think about where you work and the people who work there. As you think, consider the following:

1. Why do people come to work? For a paycheck? For recognition?
2. Do people feel motivated-that is, do they like to be at work because it is an enriching experience? If not, what is missing?
3. Consider the motivation model-energize, encourage and exhort-then think about the people in your organization.

Are the leaders setting the right example?

Are the leaders communicating?

Are the leaders challenging their people?

Are the leaders empowering others?

Are the leaders coaching?

- Are the leaders recognizing?
- Are the leaders sacrificing?
- Are the leaders inspiring?
- 4. What could you do to improve the climate for motivation?



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John Baldoni is a leadership communications consultant who works with Fortune 500 companies as well as non-profits including the University of Michigan. He is a frequent keynote and workshop speaker as well as the author of five books on leadership; the latest is *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders* (McGraw-Hill). Readers are welcome to visit his leadership resource website at [www.johnbaldoni.com](http://www.johnbaldoni.com).

*Excerpt from [Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders](#) by John Baldoni (McGraw-Hill 2005)*

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