

Dear management: Give me meaning, not money

BY DAVE MCGINN

Offering external rewards, whether it's bigger bonuses or more vacation time, is not the way to motivate employees in the 21st century, says Daniel H. Pink, author of *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. The old carrot-and-stick approach may have worked in the past, but getting people motivated now requires internal rewards such as autonomy and a sense of purpose.

What's so wrong with dangling carrots? Don't people love carrots?

They're not universally bad, actually. We respond very well to rewards and punishments. And those contingent carrots, the "if you do this, then you get that" kinds of carrots, they're pretty good if you want people to do simple tasks. They're pretty good if you want people to do something in the very short term. But they're less good for enduring motivation. And they're pretty shabby for creative works.

Why is it that the carrot-and-stick approach worked well in the 20th century but not any more, as you say in the book? Is that because people are doing more of this "creative work"?

The nature of work has changed in a way. For instance, you have more people who are doing these things that are less routine, less rule-based, more innovative, more creative. So that's one reason why these carrot-and-stick motivators

aren't as effective today.

What about companies that offer big fat bonuses? Doesn't the promise of a bonus motivate people to be productive?

Money is absolutely a motivator. So at one level, if people aren't being paid enough, you're not going to have any motivation of any kind. But beyond that, it's pretty clear that money is not a motivator for effective, productive, creative work. And what we saw on Wall Street is a sign that if you give people high-stakes rewards for short-term gain, some people are going to cheat and it can also distort the system.

How is it that offering external rewards can turn an interesting task into a chore?

It changes your reason for doing [the task]. That reward ends up crowding out the intrinsic desire. It's not as if no one wants to get paid for intrinsically interesting work. But when it's offered as a contingency it can turn something that is inherently interesting into drudgery.

What do you think managers need to do in order to better motivate people?

It's really important at the start to get pay right. Because if you don't get paid right, the whole conversation's over. Beyond that, I think it's about recasting what it means to be a manager. It's not about controlling, it's about providing opportunities for self-direction. People want to make progress,

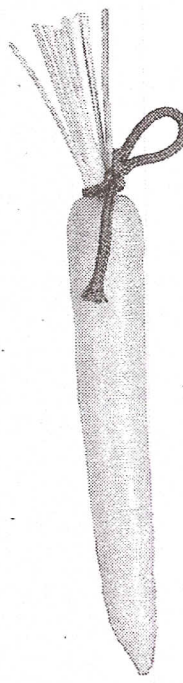
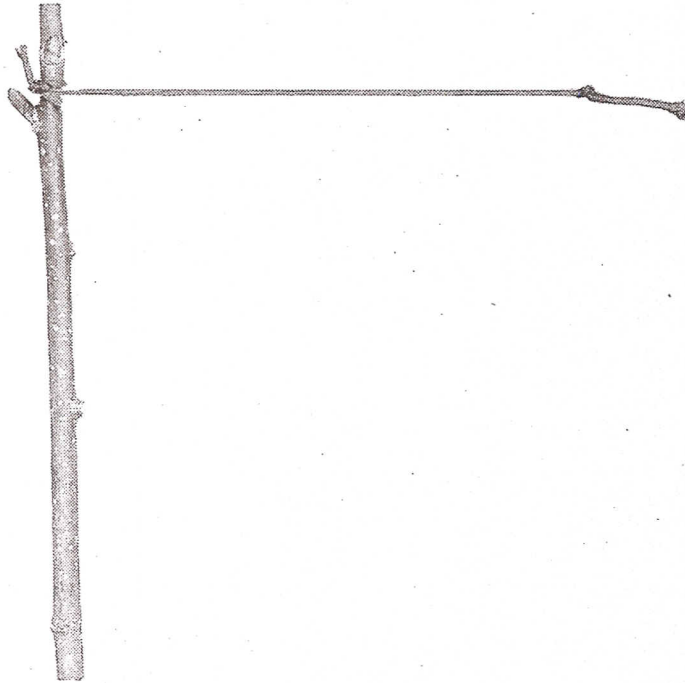


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CINDERS MCLEOD AND ROGER HALLETT/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

it's great to have a sense of control or autonomy. But it's difficult to announce to your boss you're going to be autonomous from here on out, isn't it?

It's something managers have to recognize. But I think there's some managers who are enlightened enough that if you went to them and said,

they want to get better at something. And so managers can do something really powerful in that regard in that they can help people make progress, they can offer recognition after the fact, they can give feedback. And they can infuse what's going on with a sense of purpose.

"I've been thinking about my own work and this is how I do my best work" and focused less on the input, i.e. the autonomy, and more on the output, then you might have a chance.

What about someone who works on a factory floor, or whose job simply requires a series of mundane tasks. Does your book apply to those types of work?

You're not going to turn a job sweeping floors into a job that might be deeply, inherently satisfying and challenging. But it's possible to sculpt jobs that seem to be mundane, rule-based, low-autonomy, to make them more meaningful. It's not like, "Oh, we have to add some sweetener to these bitter jobs in order for people to tolerate them." It actually helps people perform better.

if encouraging internal rewards motivates people so well, why do so many companies rely on the old carrot-and-stick approach? Is it simply because that approach is easier?

It's not that we should abandon that other method entirely. It's just that we shouldn't apply it everywhere. In fact, we shouldn't apply it for most things. But the reason that it persists is that it's easy. These carrot-and-stick motivators work in the short term because they're really good at getting our attention and getting us to do stuff. They're just not that good for long-term things.