

# **Guide on Staff Motivation**

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Guide on Staff Motivation is to give supervisors in government departments some solid and applicable ideas of staff motivation. The concept of staff motivation and its relations to human resource management will be explored.

This guide also seeks to outline important motivational factors and how such factors help motivate staff. We would also like to outline some of the staff motivational initiatives adopted service-wide and in individual departments for experience sharing purposes.

## **WHY DO WE NEED MOTIVATION ?**

*‘ People don’t change their behavior unless it makes a difference for them to do so.’*

*~~ Fran Tarkenton*

The most difficult job that faces a supervisor is learning how to effectively motivate and keep his/her employees motivated . The average person when asked how to motivate someone will tell you what motivates him or her. Unfortunately, everyone is different and what motivates one employee may only make another employee angry. The method we use to motivate each employee must be tailored to the individual employee. We must offer them something that value as an incentive to work towards a goal. One size does not fit all when it comes to motivation.

Government employees too are not immune towards this need to be motivated. They want to be recognized to ascertain their value for existence. Motivation, or rather the lack of it, is not a problem peculiar to the public sector. However, as government employees are highly visible, our motivational problems are often in the spotlight.

In the following sections of this booklet, we will be discussing ways of tackling motivational problems and provide suggestions on ways you can take to turn lethargy into energy and apathy into commitment with your employees:

- ✓ Motivation in the civil service
- ✓ Within your own boundary
- ✓ At the organizational level
- ✓ Motivation and Human Resource Management
- ✓ Your own staff motivation plan
- ✓ Motivation and you

## MOTIVATION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Before we begin exploring ways to tackle motivational problems, let us first discuss some of the telling signs of an unmotivated staff:

### *Telling Signs*

It is clear that unmotivated staff are more than just lazy staff. They are not proactive and are afraid to make decisions. The following are some remarks that typically reflect these symptoms:

*“The more you work, the more mistakes you make. So don’t do anything unless you have to. And even then, do as little as possible.”*

*“We just do our job, play it safe. We are not paid to make our own judgement. It is perfectly alright to seek and follow the boss’s instructions every time.”*

*“Why bother making suggestions? Let’s check how the job was done last time and follow suit.”*

Are these symptoms common place in the civil service? If so, how can we turn them around?

Let us reflect on the following questions:

- ✧ What prevents us from becoming motivated?
- ✧ What motivates staff?
- ✧ What are the characteristics of motivated staff ?

## ***What Prevents Government Employees from Becoming Motivated Employees?***

The common responses are the following:

- Office politics
- Repetitive, simple tasks all the time
- Unclear instruction
- Organizational vision, mission and values not clearly communicated
- Vague and contradicting instructions
- Unnecessary rules
- Unproductive meetings
- Unfairness
- Lack of information
- Discouraging responses
- Tolerance of poor performance
- Over-control
- No recognition of achievements by the community

### ***Fallacies of Motivation***

While the above “de-motivators” can adversely affect staff motivation, fallacies of motivation will put us on the wrong track and turn to waste our efforts to motivate.

☒ Some people are motivated and some are not.

“That guy is dead wood. He is on maxi. Nothing we can do about him.”

***But the truth is everybody can be motivated, the question is how.***

☒ Threat is the only motivation that some people understand.

“Do it right next time or you’ll see the consequence.”

*But the widespread use of threat leads to negativity, fear and avoidance behavior - such is not conducive to sustaining high performance.*

⊗ Rewards will do it all.

“You’re paid to do the job.”

*But real motivation is not for sale - buying allegiance is not an effective long-term motivational strategy.*

### *What Motivates Staff ?*

Is money the magic solution to motivation? There are many other effective tools to motivate staff. When junior and middle managers attending management training programmes are asked about their civil service career, they remember vividly the times when:

- they are assigned a challenging job which gives them a sense of achievement, responsibility, growth, enjoyment and a promising promotion prospect;
- their efforts are recognized and appreciated by the management and the public;
- they receive the trust and full support of supervisors;
- they can complete a job by themselves; and
- they are placed in a harmonious working environment.

### *Characteristics of a Motivated Staff*

Reflected through their actions are some of the following behaviors:

- Energetic and full of initiative
- Committed to serving the community
- Practise the mission of the organization
- Want to think for themselves

- Appreciate recognition and challenges
- Seek opportunities to improve their capabilities
- Take proactive and positive actions to solve problems
- Believe that they could contribute to make a difference
- Set their own challenging and achievable work targets



## **WITHIN OUR OWN BOUNDARY**

How do we motivate people at work? Broadly speaking, we can achieve this at two levels: the personal and organizational level. This section deals with efforts supervisors can make at the personal level.

We all enjoy working with highly motivated employees in a positive work environment. With this in mind, every manager can do something to proactively achieve the results they desire. An employee's needs are satisfied by extrinsic factors including job security, organization policies, quality of management, working conditions, job variety, learning new skills and etc. There are many motivational factors that affect an employee's motivation. The following are some common factors of motivation:

~ Worthwhile Work ~

~ The Power of Acknowledgement ~

~ Your Personal Credibility ~

~ Working Through People ~

### **~ Worthwhile Work ~**

People are motivated because they know that their work is worthwhile or when they experience their work as meaningful. There are in fact many ways to let our staff experience the meaningfulness of their job:

- Delegate tasks that challenge and stretch the skills and abilities of staff.
- Instead of assigning part of a task, let staff be responsible for the whole task from beginning to end to produce a visible outcome.
- Let staff understand why they are needed.
- Let staff understand how the result of their work has a significant impact on the well

being of other people, and how it contributes to the good governance of Hong Kong.

- Explain to staff the vision, mission and values of the department, and how their work aligns with them.
- Promote ownership of problem solving.
- Empower team member.
- Involve staff in making management decisions.

### ~ The Power of Acknowledgement ~

Motivation comes from an act of recognition, a word of encouragement, or a sense of respect. It is the power of acknowledgement that brings enthusiasm to worthwhile work. And the good news is that every manager has an unlimited supply of such power. Use this power constructively:

- Encourage the worst staff and praise them when they do something right.
- Give **TRUE** congratulations – **T**imely, **R**esponsive, **U**nconditional, **E**nthusiastic.
- Celebrate what you want to see more of.
- Cheer any progress, not just the result.
- Tell people what a great job they've done or present them an award, and make their achievements known to the community.
- Catch people doing things right, not just catch them doing things wrong.
- Give positive feedback when you spot performance improvement.
- Recognize quality performance of individual team members and thank them personally.
- Give credit to team members for their assistance to your achievement.
- Appreciate the value of risk-taking and mistakes.

### ~ Your Personal Credibility ~

Supervisors must provide a stimulating and open environment in which their employees feel comfortable to make suggestions. They should work with their employees to refine a rough idea or even draft a totally new suggestion for improvement. When this pervades loyalty

and commitment from employees will be achieved. Therefore, as a leader, in order to motivate your people, you personally have to be:

- abide by civil service core values :
  - commitment to the rule of law;
  - honesty and integrity above private interests;
  - accountability and openness in decision-making and in its action;
  - political neutrality in conducting official duties;
  - impartiality in the execution of public functions;
  - dedication and diligence in serving the community;
- a role model for team members.
- a motivated manager yourself.
- brave enough to admit it when you are wrong
- able to speak positively all the time.
- organized yourself.
- open-minded to suggestions and opinions.
- attentive to team members' emotional needs, be a human leader.
- accountable, so team members feel secure enough to take risks.

### **~ Working Through People ~**

The basic principle underpinning motivation is that if staff are managed effectively, they will seek to give of their best voluntarily without the need for control through rules and sanctions – they will eventually be self-managing.

Managers sometimes slip into the habit of:

- Always give orders and instructions, allowing no disagreement.
- Always expect staff to give twelve hours of output for eight hours' time and pay.
- Training is unnecessary.
- Staff are workers – their job is only to follow orders.
- Staff are not supposed to know the details; they are classified and need not know more than their boss' orders.
- The essence of staff management is control – the supervisors' only responsibility is to catch wrong behaviors and to avoid their repetition by punishment and discipline.

Do you want our staff to work in a demotivating environment? If not, what can we do? How can we achieve results through people? The following are some suggestions:

- Value individuals as persons.
- Address your staff as “team members” instead of subordinates.
- Be result-oriented, disseminate the purpose and objectives of tasks.
- Give people work that demands their best and allow them to learn and move ahead into uncharted territory.
- Keep team members informed of new developments.
- Encourage problem solving instead of faultfinding.
- Never say, “You’re wrong” when you disagree with them.
- Deal with errors constructively; be helpful at all times.
- Be ready to coach team members.
- Recommend inspiring training courses for team members.
- Go to team members’ place instead of asking them to come to your office all the time.
- Encourage team members’ involvement in management decisions.

## **AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL**

### ***Staff Recognition Schemes***

Organizations have different structural devices to motivate their employees. Various Staff motivation schemes have been established in the civil service and they are briefly summarized below for your reference. You may like to make use of these schemes, in addition to your own initiatives, to achieve your goal of enhancing staff motivation.

#### **I. Staff Motivation Scheme**

The objectives of the Staff Motivation Scheme are to promote staff awareness of departments' performance pledges, enhance commitment to them and to motivate staff towards continuous improvement of service in pursuance of the spirit of serving the community. The award is in kind and its maximum value is \$1,000 for an individual and, for a team , \$1,000 per team member.

#### **II. Staff Suggestions Scheme**

It aims to encourage staff to make suggestions for improving the efficiency of the civil service. Award ranges from a certificate of commendation to a cash award of up to \$15,000.

#### **III. Customer Service Award Scheme**

The objectives of the scheme are to award staff who provide good customer service; to motivate staff to enhance their efforts in providing good customer service; and to further promote a customer focused service culture in the civil service. Awards for the winners include trophies, souvenir pins and gift coupons.

In 2005, Civil Service Bureau has expanded the scope of the award and  launch it as the "Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme". Details  can be found in the website: <http://www.csb.gov.hk>

#### **IV. Staff Recognition/Performance Incentive Schemes in Trading Fund Departments**

Trading Fund departments have developed performance incentive schemes. The winners receive an award in kind in recognition of improvement in performance as measured by a set of balanced, objective and pre-determined indicators reflecting efficiency, effectiveness and standard of service.

#### **V. Long Service Travel Award Scheme**

The scheme aims to reward long-serving officers with consistent good performance. It operates on the basis of granting travel allowance to non-directorate local officers, and their spouses, selected on the basis of length of service and performance.

#### **VI. Long and Meritorious Service Award Scheme**

Civilian staff with long and meritorious service are granted an award on their 20th, 30th and 40th year of service, as follows -

- a 20 Years' Meritorious Service Certificate; or
- a 30 Years' Meritorious Service Certificate plus a commemorative gold pin; or
- a 40 Years' Meritorious Service Certificate photo-engraved on a metal plate with a wooden stand.

#### **VII. Commendation Letters**

Commendation letters may be issued to officers who have made a substantial contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of their bureau/department; or performed an exceptionally meritorious act warranting special recognition.

### ***Performance Management System***

Motivation is in many ways the key to the success of Human Resource Management. Managers should aim to increase performance through self-motivation, rather than having to use external motivation (i.e. the imposition of rules and continual improvements to conditions

of service) to bring about higher standards of performance.

Motivation should be built into the performance management system where supervisors will have the opportunity to communicate and motivate staff on their performances. Supervisors may adopt the following ways to motivate their staff:

- Discuss with staff from time to time especially at the beginning of the appraisal period and during performance review meetings, what their work goals and targets are and how they should be accomplished.
- Provide feedback on what staff have done well and where improvement could be made.
- Encourage staff to express their views on their performance.
- Assess the staff's performance throughout the appraisal period rather than focusing on periods where their performance was particularly good or bad.
- Discuss ways to empower staff.
- Consider training and/or development needs of staff and work out for them corresponding training and development plans to raise the capability of staff for performance improvement.

### **Success Factors of Staff Motivation Activities in Civil Service**

To make staff motivation activities in the civil service a success, the following factors are crucial:

- top management support
- simple administration
- comprehensive communication of the scheme among all levels of staff
- perception of the scheme / system as fair and objective
- achievable targets / objectives

## MOTIVATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

*Human Resource Management (HRM) is a planned approach to managing people effectively for performance. It aims to establish a more open, flexible and caring management style so that staff will be motivated, developed and managed in a way that they can and will give of their best to support departments' mission.*

Motivation is closely related to organizational culture which is an essential aspect of HRM.

### **Organizational Culture**

Staff motivation is the cornerstone of open, flexible and caring management culture, which the Government aims to establish through HRM.

To put it into practice, “*open*” means not only to listen to staff suggestions and opinions, but also to empower staff, accept their constructive criticisms and use their suggestions.

To be “*flexible*”, we may need to change the traditional ways of doing things. As far as staff motivation is concerned, the biggest challenge perhaps is to stop focusing on problems and the guilty party (police behavior) and start looking for those responsible for things gone right (coach behavior).

“*Caring*” calls for a human leader who would give emotional support to individuals, and at the same time attend to the overall emotional needs of team members – which includes treating them all in a fair and impartial manner.

That’s how we live the belief that “people are our most important asset”. The basic principle underpinning motivation is that if employees are led effectively, they will seek to give of their best voluntarily without the need for control through rules and sanctions -- they will eventually be self-motivating.



## **YOUR OWN STAFF MOTIVATION PLAN**

As discussed in the previous sections, some of the most effective ways for managers to motivate staff include giving praises; recognition; positive feedback; passing on feedback from more senior managers; and letting other staff know which staff have been responsible for praiseworthy work and/or effort. Too often staff experience ‘management by mistake’, where most of the feedback received is corrective or punitive for mistakes they are perceived to have made.

If staff feel that their decisions are generally supported, and when genuine mistakes are made they will be guided in the right direction; they will be more positive, confident and prepared to take on responsibility and decision-making.

When staff are shown clear expectations and when they are valued, trusted, encouraged and motivated; they will be more likely to give of their best.

Consider the following for your planning of staff motivation:

- Assess how motivated your staff are; observe whether they show the “signs” of being demotivated.
- If the problems are serious, discuss with your supervisor and decide on the course of action.
- If the problems exist but are not serious, check
  - whether the present performance management system has been fully made use of; and
  - whether the personal motivational practices discussed in section 4 have been adequately applied.
- If the “telling signs” are detected not in individual members but the whole team, get the whole team to discuss together.
- In applying personal motivational practices,
  - try to use those you feel easy to manage and feel the effect. Then test out some more.
  - invent some more of your own as you accumulate more experience.
  - share your success stories with other managers and encourage them to do their best.

## **MOTIVATION AND YOU**

Motivation is the responsibility of all supervisors. The most valuable asset of an organization is people. People have needs that must be met in the workplace. The supervisor energizes, leads, guides and motivates the employee. They show the employees how to fulfill their needs while accomplishing the goals of the organisation. Motivated and growth oriented employees are happy, committed and productive. Remember that each person has different needs and must be motivated in a slightly different manner.

Although this booklet has been written for supervisors at large, all staff can use this as a guide to motivate either their peers or counter-parties. As you may have realized that motivation is about communication, working enthusiastically together, cultivating common goals, knowing one another, helping one another to do a better and more meaningful job. It is about creating a workplace where we enjoy being because it gives meaning, support, direction and opportunities for growth.

Through motivation, we seek to secure staff commitment ; develop and manage them to give of their best to support departmental aims and objectives; and achieve the ultimate aim of serving the community better by providing quality service which our community deserves.

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**~~ The End ~~**