



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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How to Motivate Project Teams

Part of the job of a project manager is to manage resources, workplan, issues, risk, etc. A good project manager must also be able to manage and motivate people. Even if you do not have functional management responsibilities, you still need to be able to motivate the people on your project to get their work done.

Many project managers find themselves in a situation where team members are missing deadlines, but they are not sure why. It may be morale related, but maybe it is for other reasons. Follow this process to try to find out for sure.

First, Is There a Problem?

First you need to validate that you have a problem. Morale may be poor, but you may still be getting your work done on time. Just as great motivation doesn't guarantee a successful project, so poor motivation does not ensure project failure. However, even if your project team is meeting its deadlines, you may still want to increase the motivation level.

Second, Is Poor Morale Causing the Problem?

Next, if you have a problem with hitting your deadlines, let's not assume that the problem is caused by poor team motivation. There could be many reasons why people miss deadlines. The estimated deadlines may be unrealistic. The team may be struggling in an area that requires additional training. There may be communication problems that result in people being unsure as to when assignments are due. This step is probably going to require that you talk to the specific team members who are missing their dates to get a sense for the causes.

Of course, people may not come right out and say that the missed deadlines are because of low morale. One thing to look for is whether you get illogical reasons for missing end dates, or perhaps no reason at all. Team members may point to others on the team who seem to lack motivation. They may sound tired, or they may not want to talk. They may sound negative or defeatist. All of these could point to poor morale.

Look for Causes of Poor Morale

Let us assume now that you have validated that you have problems and that they are morale related. Next, you should see if you can determine the cause. In the prior discussions where you determined morale was a problem, you may have also determined the cause. If you did not, it may take more questions and probing to figure this out. In many cases, the cause is outside of your control. For instance, if your business is not doing well and people are being laid off, then morale is bound to be poor and your team may find it hard to perform at its peak. If your stock price is falling, the people with stock options may be less motivated. On the other hand, there may be causes that are more within your control. For instance, team members may have had to work substantial overtime over a sustained period. Team members may feel that they are not getting the



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recognition they deserve, or they may feel that the project manager is not listening to their concerns.

Turning Things Around - Take Care of the Basics First

Next, you will need to try to turn things around. Some of the root causes may be beyond your control to fix. For instance, you may not be able to cause the stock price to rise. However, there are things within your control. The first rule is to take care of the basics. For instance, encourage open communication on the team. Also make sure you are available to talk and to listen to their concerns. Make sure that people's training needs are met. Make sure that your working environment is clean. Do all you can to make sure people can lead a balanced life, and are not working overtime over extensive periods. Taking care of basics is a way to make sure that people do not have reasons to complain. On the other hand, these are the basics. Industrial psychologist Frederick Herzberg found that when the basics were missing, motivation was reduced. However, you are not going to have high morale just by doing the basics. But you need to start there.

Be Creative to Work on the Extras

In addition to the basics, look for other opportunities to increase morale and motivation. Herzberg found that things like achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement provide positive benefits. Consider ideas such as the following:

- **Talk about the business value of the work.** Make sure people see the value of their work and know that they are providing benefits to the business. Discuss the business drivers for the project. Better yet, have the business client explain this to the team. If people think they are doing something important, they will feel better about their work.
- **Recognize people.** Even if people do not get paid the highest dollar and if they have worthless stock options, they can still be happy. Providing recognition can go a long way. Make sure that you recognize people for a job well done. Praise people in front of the team. Recognize good performance to your managers. Ask your business sponsor to praise the team for accomplishments.
- **Build camaraderie.** Get the team together often and build a sense of team loyalty. Instead of having people complain privately, get the team together to share experiences, conduct cross training, share lunches, etc. If people really feel a part of a team, they are bound to pull together and not let the rest of the team down.
- **Give people more responsibility.** People respond better when they have responsibility. The project manager can also challenge people with new or increased levels of responsibility on a project.
- **Have fun.** There is a lot that can be done to have fun on a project team. This can include pizza lunches (the team can chip in if your company will not pay). You can take turn bringing in donuts for breakfast. Give people certificates for offbeat accomplishments like being the tallest on the team. Get your most outgoing people to



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plan some quirky events for the team. Fun is contagious. If team members see others enjoying themselves, they will feel better too.

Summary

You may find obvious signs that morale is poor on your team. You also might find that the team is missing deadlines, which could be a symptom of poor morale. However, when you have a concern about morale, follow this general process:

1. Validate that you have a problem to begin with. If your project is hitting deadlines and on track, you may not have a problem to worry about.
2. If your project has problems, determine whether morale is, in fact, one of the causes. There may be other factors that are causing your team to miss their deadlines.
3. Look for the causes of the morale problem and determine which ones are in your direct control to resolve.
4. Make sure that the basic needs of the team are satisfied
5. Be creative in looking for ways to improve motivation and morale. You might be surprised. There is a lot within your control.

If you are a project manager or a people manager, team morale is a part of your responsibility. Use this process to get the team excited again and keep the project on track. Nothing motivates people like being a part of success, being part of a team and having fun.