

WORKING KNOWLEDGE

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People are often coin-operated when it comes to work, but managers can bring out their best performance using motivators other than money.

by Sean Silverthorne

Popular

Former Sun Microsystems CEO Scott McNealy was known to criticize staff for being "coin-operated" instead of mission-driven. Understanding what motivates good performance is crucial for managers to master. Here is a collection of stories from our archive that highlight Harvard Business School research on motivation.

[The Most Powerful Workplace Motivator](#)

The most powerful workplace motivator is our natural tendency to measure our own performance against the performance of others.

[Excellence Comes From Saying No](#)

Why it's better to be excellent at one thing than good at everything.

[To Motivate Employees, Give an Unexpected Bonus \(or Penalty\)](#)

Employees can be more motivated by the anticipation of a reward or punishment than the actual payoff.

Why Government 'Nudges' Motivate Good Citizen Behavior

Research finds that psychological nudges can be a cost-effective way for governments to get citizens to do the right thing.

Hiding From Managers Can Increase Your Productivity

Forget management by walking around. Decreasing workplace transparency can increase worker productivity.

Money and Quotas Motivate the Sales Force Best

Bonus programs are effective for motivating sales people, but also costly for companies to maintain. Which programs work best?

A Little Understanding Motivates Copyright Abusers to Pay Up

Many internet users don't give a second thought to copying and reusing an image. Here's how copyright holders can gently persuade abusers to do the right thing.

How to Demotivate Your Best Employees

Many companies hand out awards such as "employee of the month," but do they work to motivate performance? Not really.

Knowing What Your Boss Earns Can Make You Work Harder

Learning what your co-worker earns can make you less productive, but knowing your manager's paycheck can motivate you to work harder.

Research Papers

Research Paper Goals Gone Wild: The Systematic Side Effects of Over-Prescribing Goal Setting

For decades, goal setting has been promoted as a halcyon pill for improving employee motivation and performance in organizations. Know when goals can go off the rails.

Research Paper Is Overconfidence a Motivated Bias? Experimental Evidence

People are most at risk of making overly positive self-assessments when their assessment criteria are not clearly defined. Yet, even within ambiguous domains, providing clearly defined criteria for what makes a productive employee, an effective leader, and an efficient team, may help people better calibrate their self-perceptions with reality.