

Employee Motivation Tip: Break the Golden Rule

It looks very simple, right? "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Golden Rule seems so undisputed that it might be a panacea for every relationship. Simply behave toward everyone the way you would like to be handled and all will run easily, yes?

Just a minute... Something appears to be wrong...

Does your twenty-something top gun account rep want the exact same things from their career that your forty-something office clerk does? Is your technical staff looking for the same goals and reimbursement as your receptionist?

Apparently, their desires are quite unique, but quite a few managers use a one-size fits all approach when appreciating their highly valued staff. After a big contract is completed, everybody is awarded an identical thing, whether you buy them breakfast or a gas card. Providing an identical reward to each contributor is what's fair, right? But is it truly fair for your key people?

Retain Your Key Performers

Startlingly few managers understand that the [Pareto Principle](#) lesson regarding their staff teaches that 20% of their staff are delivering 80% of your entire team's income. Further, nearly every management book cites studies which compare the productivity of the key workers to the least competent (yet still effective) workers. The distinction between the extremes has been reported as high as one hundred to 1. The nearest these [numbers] ever seem to approach is at best 4:1. So now how much more does this extraordinary sway in value wind up costing?

Assuming that your yearly salary for the company's least competent person is ,000, how much are you paying your key staff? Since a fair bit of the costs for an employee are fixed, those costs don't go up in relation to base salary. For the intent of this example, let's use some worst-case figures, k. Assuming that your k employee generates k of value (otherwise they'd be gone, right?). If your key employee is a measly four times as productive as the worst, they deliver far more value for how much more they cost.

If you invests in more classes for the low-end staff, costs instantly go up, but without any promise that productivity will likewise go up. Think about what part of your pay is factored into the "cost" of this moderately competent employee? Probably none. Management costs are usually invisible, factored away as overhead. It certainly **feels** like you're being productive - trying your hardest to bring along the strugglers, hoping that they eventually rise above their shortcomings. Consider how much of your time is spent with either of these employees:

The self-managing dynamo who, with speed of a bullet train, handles customer complaints, delivers defect-free results, and even cleans up after himself in the break room

The trainee who has some interpersonal issues, occasional product defects, some trouble following instructions, and shows up late on Mondays due to the occasional hangover

Indeed your key performers are worth weight in gold. As such, it's crucial for every entrepreneur to retain their top performers, as this handful of hotshots represents 80% of your team's value. Their experience with your unique processes together with their skills and ability to get the job done in a pinch makes them nigh unto invaluable.

But, what's the best way to invest in your key people? How do you indicate to those high performers that they're appreciated, and increase the likelihood that they'll be there for you when you need them again?

What's the best way to reward your superstars?

Coat their palms with silver. If your k staffer puts in 80-hour weeks during the final push of a key project, most pure cash rewards would come in at a rate **less than** minimum wage. Simply reconsider this alternative. This can be extremely insulting, seen, instead, as a paltry offering to pay them off and ease a boss' guilty conscience. Regardless, once the IRS gets his share, the ultimate impact of this cash might be far less than it costs to pay it out.

Send them to extra training. Some people might be excited about a chance to take a course in a place expenses to the company. They may even like to spend a few days before or after, on their own, just to cash in on this opportunity to take a breather. Watch out though, this could appear to your top performer that you thought their results lacking. They might believe that they must take additional classes to be worthy of the ultimate reward that

waits at the end. If your staffer is thin-skinned, they might get concerned that their effort they exerted was a warning sign to you that they were having a hard time. Proposing a training award in this situation could be mistaken that their struggle was obvious to you, and you are now taking corrective steps.

Promote them. Though the appeal of a striking title or material gains associated with a promotion may encourage some, more and more workers have come to recognize the dangers of [the Peter Principle](#). They fear that their world will shift drastically if they become a position of greater responsibility. Your powerful personnel probably **like** their current job. That's why they're so incredibly capable at it. Before trying out a promotion as praise, make sure that the new position truly takes advantage of the talents and abilities of these high achievers, or you may end up having to replace them. If you risk it, ensure your top performer knows that it's alright to get their old job again if it doesn't work out in the newly promoted situation.

Provide extra time off. Everyone wants to get away, right? However, if you give this bonus to a very committed person who is so totally immersed in their career that they have little else in their lives of the workplace, they may not know what to do during all of this time off.

Do unto others as *they* would have done unto them.

As you can see, there are innumerable methods to reward your top. It's dangerously simplistic to give all of your team members the same award. It's **especially** dangerous to give them something you'd like yourself.

These examples take us to an all-important concept: **communication**. To summarize, **ask** your key people what they *really* would like. What reward will let them to truly understand that they are loved? The experiences that causes a person to turn into a talented salesperson is quite distinct than the life of a great administrative assistant. You may be shocked by the replies you get back. In reality, your staff may be delighted, as well, to discover that you are really listening to their ideas to determine the reward for their hard work.

- Do they want more money?
- Do they want more demanding assignments?
- Do they want a little time off to appreciate their children?
- Would they rather have more mentoring?
- Do they simply want to be recognized at a company meeting?
- What have they received in the past that really made them feel good?

The results can differ drastically for each person, depending upon their long-term ambitions, how their needs are currently being met in [Maslow's Needs Hierarchy](#), and the current difficulties in their life. Don't make the blunder of presupposing that the answer you hear now will remain the same throughout your high performer's career.

In the end, instead of hoping to reward your people the way you would like to be rewarded, break The Golden Rule, and invest the time actually learning their needs and wants. By involving them in choices that affect their lives so immediately, you might unexpectedly take advantage of the Hawthorn Effect, and encourage your worker by demonstrating you care. You will probably notice that you've created a workplace that makes your high achievers happier than they've ever been. As a result, they will find a way to push themselves to new levels of productivity, understanding that their pains will result in rewards that are truly meaningful to **them**. You may even earn their respect and commitment for a lifetime.

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