

# Motivate a slumping team with an approach that's worked for 65 years

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*If you're looking to motivate your team there are some approaches that can be easily implemented and bring quick results. In this blog, leadership coach John M McKee discusses an idea that has been used very successfully worldwide for decades.*

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“I give up! There’s a job crisis out there and every day more people are getting let go. But my team doesn’t seem to show any more care about their performance now than they did 2 years ago! Maybe I should get rid of the whole group and hire some people who’d appreciate having a job.”

This message arrived in my email from a potential client a few weeks back. He was frustrated and wanted to know if I could help him by providing some “management tools” that would make his team more productive.

Without talking to him, it was impossible to know if his team could be energized, but after 30+ years in business and coaching, I did know that his problem isn’t particularly unique. My first question was more about the reasons behind their lack of performance: Was this a team entirely comprised of bad eggs, or was their performance due to his style? The issue he voiced isn’t new, of course. Managers and bosses have probably made similar comments since the beginning of the modern Industrial Age.

So - perhaps he didn’t need a business/leadership coach after all.

Possibly his issue could be resolved simply by reading an academic paper penned back in 1943.

Written by an American psychologist named Abraham Maslow, the work has been a core foundation for many therapists and psychologists for years. Likewise, in my opinion, it should be just as well used by anyone who aspires to be a serious leader or coach.

Titled *A Theory of Human Motivation*, the paper was one of the first to tie together motivation with productivity in a well-documented and researched manner. It went on to detail what Maslow called a person’s hierarchy of needs. In short: one doesn’t start looking for a job that is empowering for one’s higher calling before he’s figured out how to make enough to feed himself. Subsequently, once a person has covered all the basic physical needs, he will start to look for things which are more meaningful such as love, esteem, and ultimately self-actualization.

Now you may be saying, John, that sounds okay in theory, but how does Maslow's 65-year-old paper apply to the frustrated client, to organizational leadership, and most-importantly, to me as a leader?

Here's a real world example that I came across a few years ago.

At the time, the leader of a San Francisco based hotel chain, called Joie de Vivre, had just used the theories of Maslow to turn around a near-failure. The CEO Chip Conley had been searching for new approaches to turn the business around. As part of that quest, he went into a bookstore where he came across a copy of Maslow's book, *Toward a Psychology of Being*. He'd read the book in college and recalled that, at the time, he'd been knocked out by Maslow's understandable and common-sense approach. He bought the book and put it to use. Later, in an interview, he talked about how he'd used Maslow's fundamentals to save his company during a time when other businesses were crashing all around. I checked it out recently to find that, years later, Joie de Vivre is now even bigger than it was back then.

Conley applied the basics of Maslow's work to his operation. In doing so he re-created the entire environment, based on the simple premise that all employees, clients, and even shareholders of an organization have similar psychological needs. His belief - and it proved to be true - was that treating those stakeholders in a manner which rewarded each of their hierarchy of needs would result in his company turning around and then prospering.

Conley made a comment back then that I regard to be fundamental to management, but it's too-often forgotten. He noted that *people who feel recognized tend to be loyal*.

By treating his employees (80% house cleaning staff, by the way), clients, and shareholders with respect, and recognizing all the many "little" things they do, he created a very successful chain. It survived. And today, while other so-called "prestige" hotels fail (like the recently bankrupt high-end St Regis in Orange County, CA) his chain continues to prosper. And, it didn't cost a lot to do this.

If you haven't read Maslow, you should. If you did read him years ago, but are having troubles with your team's performance, consider reading it again. Or else, you can call us at Business Success Coach.net. We'd be happy to help.

Loading ...

john

Leadership Coach

*A former leader of national organizations across the US and Canada, **John M McKee** is the author of 2 books, "Career Wisdom", and "21 Ways Women in Management Shoot Themselves in the Foot". A frequent guest on national TV and radio programs, he has published numerous articles on leadership and executive strategy. Involved in coaching since 1988, he is the CEO of BusinessSuccessCoach.net founded in 2001.*

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