



## WHITE PAPER SERIES

Understanding Job Satisfaction: What motivates an employee?

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One does not have to reach too far to understand that satisfied employees tend to be more productive workers. Satisfaction, according to Herzberg, is derived from two main features - *hygiene issues* and *motivating factors*. The following will examine these terms and discuss how they apply to contemporary business.

### Hygiene Issues - Job Dissatisfaction

Hygiene issues are the forces that lessen the plane of dissatisfaction an employee has with his or her job. These issues do not serve to motivate an employee, but they can decrease the level of job satisfaction if not given their proper due. Hygiene issues relate to an employees environment, and they include company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions.

Let me begin by clearly stating that I believe work to be a necessary evil of life that I have chosen. I state that knowing full well that I could live life without working, however, I am not willing to deal with the consequences of such a decision. As such, I am a huge proponent of hygiene factors. Anything that can reduce the level of dissatisfaction that work creates for me, is something in which I take a keen interest. In general, hygiene factors are relatively self-evident and self-explanatory. For example, policies and procedures are in nearly every organization, dictating action and protocol, much like a rulebook. Employees

who succeed by following the guidelines set down in the policy and procedural manual will get rewarded, while those who do not comply with the rules will get penalized. It is essential that employees understand the company's policies such that they have clear, impartial, and fair guidelines to which they adhere.

Supervision is another area in which organizations can reduce the level of dissatisfaction for an employee. Talented supervisors demonstrate leadership, fairness, and a degree of emotional intelligence that encourages job satisfaction. Good supervisors use positive feedback, set clear goals, and use well defined rating systems. Employees will perform better if they know what is expected of them.

The next hygiene factor is probably the most obvious. Salary. In graduate school a professor of mine asked this: "If you were rich, would you work?" My answer was a resounding, "No". I work because it offers me a lifestyle that I would not otherwise have access to. If you were to ask me this: "if you were not compensated fairly for your work, would you be a satisfied employee?" I would offer you the same answer I did on the first day of that class.

The next two factors are interpersonal relations and working conditions. Clearly, if an individual had to work all day without the luxury of a few social moments, they would certainly be less inclined to flow to the direction of satisfaction. In fact, they would probably be miserable. For the most part, our country does not offer too many jobs that disallow their employees at least a few moments of socialization.

In contrast, working conditions refer to the physical unit in which employees operate every day. "Physical working condition" has a number of different meanings according to the particulars of each job. For example, a factory environment probably is not going to provide their employees with mahogany furniture in order for them to more effectively carry out their line work - nor are factory employees expecting this type of environmental accommodation. By the same token, these employees need to feel safe and secure when they go into work in order to lessen any potential dissatisfaction. An individual spending eight hours of their day in constant fear that a two-ton anvil might fall on their head is less inclined to be satisfied than an employee working in an environment who has leaders that have implemented appropriate safety measures and procedures (i.e. Wiley Coyote).

In an office environment, it is the individual with the mahogany furniture and the corner office is more likely to be satisfied than the forty underlings who are confined to their overcrowded cubicles. I fall somewhere in the middle. I find myself less dissatisfied.

Again, hygiene issue can't motivate individuals however, if not handled appropriately, they can turn employees off and create a less effective working

environment. This negative result will drive away the true talent and leave an employer with mediocre workers, less clientele, and a weaker business.

## **Motivators - Job Satisfaction**

Now that we know how to *prevent job dissatisfaction*, we can move into strategies for actually *creating job satisfaction*. From my perspective, this is the highest level of achievement that I can ever hope to obtain. I will never love work, but I do experience elements of satisfaction in my job - in case anyone cares.

The first motivating factor is the work itself. Every job carries a different status depending on age, culture, task, etc. What is important for creating motivation is that employees, no matter the status of their work, feel that their job is important. *Dirty Jobs*, the TV show on the Discovery Channel, chronicles the host as he goes from one horrible job to the next, carry out the American tasks that people don't really know about. In watching scattered fragments of the program, it occurred to me that all the jobs that transpire in America, do so because they meet a need. People don't walk through sewers and inseminate cows because they think it's funny, they carry out these tasks because they meet a demand, and often, a need. Workers need to know that what their doing, matters.

The next force that motivates employees is the feeling of achievement. People are satisfied when they meet a challenge. Employees must be given a set of achievable challenges that they are capable of overcoming. This can occur in every job that exists, whether you are a waste management engineer, or a fiber optic engineer. The point is, don't set employees up for failure by charging them with tasks that do not coincide with their capabilities, and never allow workers to become stagnant by giving them non-challenging assignments.

The third factor is something that we all crave as human beings. It is the desire for recognition. Seriously, who wants to do work that goes unnoticed? Even missionaries living in destitute area's of Africa, despite their renunciation of the world's values, yearn for recognition, even if that recognition comes from God. Maslow speaks to this in his pyramid of needs as the basic desire for esteem, in oneself, and from others.

Responsibility and advancement make up the last two motivating factors. Though I admittedly hate the thought of responsibility, I work harder and feel a greater degree of satisfaction from work when I own the results. This speaks to the above concept as well. When we own a project that succeeds, we are more likely to receive recognition. At the same time, if we fail, well then, we own that failure as well. I'd rather not deal with any of it, but again, work is a necessary evil of the life that I have chosen.

Lastly, people are motivated by the possibility of advancement. Moving up the chain of command is the desire of most American workers. Traditionally, it is the goal to end up at the top of the ranks, among the few and the proud. In a larger

sense, this works in a generational setting as well. Our fathers and mothers want us to get further than they did, right? With advancement comes greater perks, increased status, more control, and ultimately, more responsibility. Or, if you want to, you can just trick an employee by giving them a title that radiates machismo.

In summation, it is critical to know that *hygiene issues* do not breed motivation. That is to say, they do not create satisfaction, but they prevent dissatisfaction. In a sense, hygiene issues can't directly help business, but they can directly hurt it. Contrastingly, *motivating factors* can actually create satisfaction. These factors encourage and inspire workers to step up to the plate and render their best offerings. These concepts are critical for all leaders to know and understand - and implement. This is an art, not a science, and as such, practicing these theories requires experimentation and modification. Some will work more effectively than others, but it is important for leaders to be aware of their potential ramifications, so that they can mold stronger individuals, create a more cohesive environment, and assemble a healthier organization.

## Old versus New

### *Old*

The greatest differences in the old economy and the new economy are centered around the perceptions of the individual worker. When I picture the old economy, my mind conjures up images of *Leave it to Beaver*. The father comes home driving his Buick from work 5p.m., as does every other father in the neighborhood, to his wife and family to enjoy the fruits of his standardized work environment, and the comforts of his regimented existence. Of course, silly domestic problems did occur, but were quickly worked out. Children made mistakes and then learned valuable lessons from them. Teenagers met people they loved, got married, and lived out the same lives as their parents.

Put into this context, the old economy was incredibly stable and very homogenous. Husbands didn't come home from their day at the engineering plant and throw their wives down the stairs. Beaver might have gotten caught in a white lie from time to time, but he never loaded up his AK-47 with the intention of carrying out a shooting tear at the local high school. Teenagers didn't get hopped up on PCP, and then go and rape the prom queen. Of course, these are gross exaggerations and mildly inaccurate depictions of standard life, but they do speak to some of the changes that come with the passage of time.

One thing most certainly true of the old economy is that people conformed. Work was as stable as its workers. Individuals were not of an entrepreneurial mind-set (as they are today). I think the most significant aspect of the old economy is that workers expected what they got - and got what they expected.

## *New*

Today, peoples' expectations run the spectrum from nothing to everything. What is highly evident is the fact that there is a very nebulous definition of the word *norm*. The new economy no longer speaks of a fair salary according to a job, rather, it has morphed into an environment of employees demanding payment based on their value. Today, a 25 year old person can make twice the salary of a person with 25 years in the professional arena. Today, an individual's value is determined by the relationship of their skill set to their vocational market. The traditional chain of command is blurry and there is no longer a smooth glide path to success (ask Bill Gates). One day he was a nobody, and the next day he could buy and sell eternity.

## *Expectations*

It does not come as a great surprise to learn that one of the key factors' that contributes to worker satisfaction is that of compensation. It is no greater a shock to learn that most people (60%) feel that they are underpaid, women more so than men. One might however, be surprised to learn that money is not the number one force that leads to satisfaction, or a lack thereof. My contention would have held salary in pole position for adding or detracting from satisfaction. I would have attributed this to mans' natural tendency toward greed and self preservation.

The real deterrent to satisfaction, when it comes to pay, occurs when an individual feels that they are being slighted when their pay does not equal the value that they produce. In this sense, it is not the money that disaffects people (directly), but rather it is the money compared to their value to the company. Salary earned versus valued created may appear to run a fine line, but in my estimation it is an important line, and valid call for complaint and dissatisfaction.

Another facet that creates satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the degree to which employees embrace work as a social venue. Are we happy with our colleagues? Do we truly enjoy the companionship of our co-workers? Is your boss tolerable? Would we rather watch the office burn to the ground with everyone in it? Clearly, this has a huge impact on worker satisfaction. In my case, depending on who's in the office on any given day, the answer to the above questions will go either way. It seems a wiser road to not get too invested in our work at the social level. In following my tendency to go against my own logic, some of my co-workers are a huge part of my life. Before you ask the question, let me answer - "yes, I see the possibility for an awkward disaster here". Life is a risk.

Lastly, and I think most importantly, is the idea of empowerment. Are people given the autonomy that they were expecting? Do they control their daily operations? Does the boss say, "here's the job, now make it happen". Very simply, workers with more control over their jobs (big picture) are generally more

satisfied. Again, this speaks to Maslow's need for a feeling of significance. The more power a boss offers, the larger your stake in the big dance, the more you control the outcome, the more seriously you take your role, and the more you are satisfied with your employment.

At the end of the day, I am satisfied with my job. In all the above examples, the good always outweighs the bad, and I never carry the bad beyond the door of my office. I receive a fair salary, I have a deep personal relationship with 90% of my co-workers, and I have a basic autonomy over an average day, with the occasional exception of the aforementioned boss. This may sound contrary to the original premise that I consider work a necessary evil. It's not. Work is still a necessary (for the lifestyle I've chosen) evil, but that doesn't mean I can't be satisfied with my job.

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