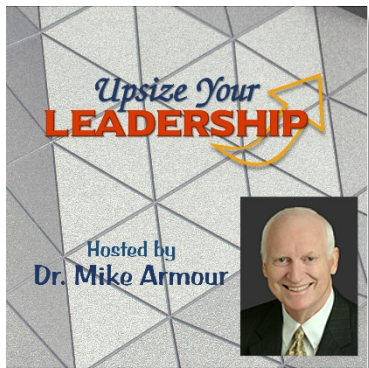# Holding Workers Close
Motivating Them to Remain Committed
Hosted by Dr. Mike Armour

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Leaders intuitively understand that they must keep their people motivated. And they understand that worker motivation depends on much more than simply good pay and benefits. As a result, there's a tremendous market among leaders for books and workshops on motivation.

One aspect of motivation, however, is rarely discussed. Yet, in my experience of over 50 years in leadership roles, this aspect of motivation is often the decisive factor in whether people become part of your organization or team to begin with and whether they stay with the organization long-term.

And the principles which I'm sharing today are equally valid for every type of organization, whether a for-profit business, a non-profit, an institution, or a governmental agency. Wherever you lead, today's episode will help you Upsize Your Leadership.

A few months ago, I devoted an episode of Upsize Your Leadership to the importance of what I call "second paychecks." I use this term to describe the fulfillment and emotional satisfaction which workers receive from their job.

Today I want to talk about second paychecks from a slightly different perspective. I want to focus on what I will refer to as "motivational connections." A motivational connection is what leads a worker – or a volunteer in the case of non-profit groups – to want to be part of a particular team or organization. Motivational connections are what secures the interest, loyalty, and commitment of individual team members, employees, or volunteers.

We can classify these motivational connections under seven headings, which I will outline in a moment. But first, let me explain why they are important.

Even though there are seven classes of motivational connections, only one or two of them will have enough gravitational pull to create a worker's emotional bond to the organization. This powerful attraction can be thought of as the worker's primary motivational connection. When we use the term "primary motivational connection" today, remember that we are not talking about the full range of motivational connections, but the one or two which most fully account for a worker's desire to be part of an organization or some component within it.

Primary motivational connections are highly individualized. You can't assume that all your employees, team members, or volunteers have the same motivation for joining forces with you. To the degree possible, leaders need to know the primary motivational connection for workers on an individual basis.

Why? Because if that primary motivational connection is damaged, diminished, or removed, even the most engaged workers will lose their enthusiasm. And given the opportunity, they may very well leave.

Keeping primary motivational connections strong and vibrant is thus a core duty for leaders. So, let's take a moment to lay out the seven classes of motivational connection. And I've identified all seven of them with words which begin with the letter "A."

First are the Aims of the organization. What purpose does it pursue? What is the greater good which it strives to achieve? What difference does it seek to make in the world?

In volunteer organizations and non-profit groups, the aims of the organization are the most common primary motivational connections. People join these groups because of noble or admirable aspirations which drive the group.

But the aims of the organization are also frequently the motivational connection for workers in the for-profit community. Companies which sell organic products attract workers who want to promote a toxic-free world. Businesses which support the medical community often draw workers who want a job which contributes to general health and well-being.

The second motivational connection is Achievement. People are motivated to be part of groups because of what they can achieve individually or because of what the group can achieve collectively. In the U.S., this is perhaps the most common primary motivational connection in the for-profit sector. That's why extrinsic motivations such as salaries and promotions are such a major motivational factor in for-profit businesses.

The third motivational connection is Affiliation with certain people. This motivational connection is particularly common in businesses where the owners build their core operations around friends and relatives. Family-owned and family-run businesses tend to maintain a family-like culture as the business grows in size, so that deep friendships develop among the workers. Even when the business goes through difficulties, workers tend to stick with the company because they enjoy the affiliation with the others who work there.

The fourth motivational connection is the Activities which are part of the job. People who relish speaking before a group may accept a training position because it gives them ample opportunities to make presentations. They will be less interested in a training position where their sole responsibility is to develop curriculum. People who love outdoor activities may be drawn to jobs which put them out in the elements even in less-than-ideal weather, but disinterested in jobs which keep them warm and cozy behind a desk.

The fifth motivational connection is Access to information, people, technology, or privileges which the job permits. Thousands of people are attracted to lower-paying positions in the airline industry because it gives them and their family access to inexpensive travel. Staffers in Washington, D.C. accept minimal salaries to have access to the halls of power. One reason that I enjoyed my career in intelligence was that it gave me access to levels of information which would otherwise be foreclosed to me.

The sixth motivational connection is an Atmosphere which the worker enjoys. Many young men and women who join the Marine Corps do so out of attraction to the atmosphere of discipline and tradition which permeates the Corps. My millennial daughter once took a pay cut and moved to a job hundreds of miles away because the atmosphere surrounding the new job was so filled with fun. When the fun began to dissipate a few years later, she moved on.

The seventh motivational connection is Assurance of a salary, a secure job, or personal safety. A good friend of mine long dreamed of trying his hand at consulting. He took a stab at it for a few years, but soon returned to his former line of work in corporate America. He discovered that when companies hit economic hardships, the first expenses which they cut are contracts with outside consultants. For him, he discovered, having the assurance of a secure job and salary was a primary motivational connection.

These then are the seven motivational connections: aims, achievements, affiliation, activities, access, atmosphere, and assurance. The motivation which they provide is intrinsic. That is, it is self-generated by the individual. Yet the context in which these intrinsic motivations can flourish is found in and created by the organization or team itself. As we noted earlier, if the organization makes changes which thwart a worker's primary motivational connection, odds of losing the worker increase markedly.

We've all seen this – and understand it – with workers whose primary motivational connection is achievement. A simple failure to get a promotion or a raise which they expected is often enough for them to quit. Or if they joined what they thought was a winning organization, only to see it start to flounder, these types of workers are among the first to abandon ship to find something more promising elsewhere.

Similar things happen when someone's primary motivational connection is the aim of the organization or specific activities associated with the worker's job. Consider a company whose aim is to build low-cost housing. If it decides instead to start building shopping centers, it risks losing those whose motivational connection was the aim of providing affordable housing.

Or consider a person who enthusiastically joined a team because it afforded him an opportunity to do extensive hands-on research. What if this team member is reassigned to a job which consists almost entirely of writing summaries of research done by others, not performing research himself. The change in activity may well trigger a decision to leave.

When affiliation is the primary motivational connection, disrupted relationships easily lead to workers leaving or becoming less productive, even if they are well-compensated. This very dynamic destroyed a business which was one of my earliest clients. Started by a husband and wife, the company built its core staffing around extended family and close friends. To a person, everyone was proud of the product which they produced and enjoyed their part in creating it. But what truly drew everyone together was the affiliation with friends and family.

When the company sold for a handsome sum, the new ownership began to implement cost-saving measures by making indiscriminate terminations. Some of the most beloved people in the company were let go.

A few months later, I was called in to help the new owners understand why morale and productivity had dropped so sharply that entire product lines were in jeopardy. By the time they brought me on board, however, it was too late. The sense of affiliation, which had been the

company's "secret sauce," had already been destroyed. The heart had literally been ripped from the company, and in short order, it went under.

When I think of people whose primary motivational connection is access to technology and privileges, one person in particular comes to mind. He was a Navy commander who had inherited such wealth that he could live quite comfortably if he never worked another day in his life. Yet, here he was in the Navy, drawing a salary which was a mere pittance of the income from his inheritance. He was only in the Navy because he loved to fly, and the Navy gave him access to state-of-the-art aircraft which he could never fly anywhere else. Access was his motivational connection. Once health issues disqualified him from flying, he left the Navy at his earliest opportunity. With the cockpit no longer accessible to him, he had no desire to stay.

I have an equally vivid picture of a man for whom the motivational connection was the organizational atmosphere. He was what the Disney corporation calls an "imagineer." These are people who design many of the amazing animated figures for which Disney theme parks and movies are famous. He had been an early collaborator with Walt Disney himself and created many of the most memorable animatronics for theme parks and Disney films.

He thoroughly loved his work and his eyes would light up whenever he talked about the animated wonders which he had created. But he walked away from it all after Walt Disney died and the studio began filming movies with adult themes on the back lot. When I asked him why, after all those years, he chose to quit, he answered, "The mouse has died and the rats have taken over."

He, like hundreds of his peers, had been drawn to Disney because of its family-friendly atmosphere. When the atmosphere began to change, the monetary paycheck was not enough to hold him.

I could repeat stories like this endlessly. They all illustrate that managers need to understand and respect the motivational connection which has brought their people to the organization. Do you know what the motivational connection is for your individual team members? It's simple to find out. Just ask them, "What is the one thing which you enjoy most about being here?" Then listen to their answer. In all likelihood, it will fall into one of the categories which we describe as motivational connections.

When I posed that question recently to workers in an engineering firm, I received a broad range of answers. For some the thing which they enjoy most is doing design work with state-of-the-art software. Activity and access to technology are their motivational connections. For others it is the opportunity to enhance their resume by working on challenging projects. Achievement is their motivational connection. For others it is the family-like culture which permeates the firm. In their case, the organizational atmosphere is the motivational connection. Still others spoke of the deep friendship which they had developed with co-workers and the company's owners. Affiliation is the motivational connection for them.

You are likely to find equally diverse answers on your own team. Your role as a manager is to identify these connections and to do everything possible to help them flourish. On high-performing teams, without exception, motivational connections are strong and vibrant with every team member.

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