

# Motivation

BoardRoom Magazine January/February 2014

Chris wanted the professional staff to be more engaged with the members. Chris knew that members enjoyed seeing great golfers up close, hitting long tee shots and getting the ball close on approaches. So Chris offered the staff \$100 to play with a threesome of members each month and shoot par. Chris believed this would be a highly attractive scheme, allowing the professionals to make some extra money and the members to enjoy playing rounds of golf with great players. After three months, however, not a single round had been played. In the end, Chris removed the monetary incentive and simply dictated that the assistant professionals play one round per month with a variety of members. Every month, like clockwork, the professionals turned in their work sheets, letting Chris know whom they played with and what their scores had been. What was the deal?! The professionals dutifully played with members when directly ordered to so. But Chris's offer to reward the professionals' high scores with cash prizes—which Chris had thought would motivate the professionals to play with members voluntarily—apparently held no interest for them.

Employing motivational strategies to improve performance is an essential skill for any manager. However, as the above scenario illustrates, individuals sometimes fail to respond to obvious incentives in a way that may, at first glance, seem inexplicable. Why would golf professionals fail to be motivated by an opportunity to earn money through skilled play? A more detailed understanding of how motivation operates for particular individuals allows us to explain such situations, and to devise better motivational strategies for the future. It seems logical to assume, for example, that most professionals are hard-driven competitors. Achieving PGA status requires years of dedication and practice, so a manager might easily assume that a simple challenge would be motivation enough. But, as David McClelland of Boston University describes in his seminal textbook *Human Motivation*, there are in fact four basic motivating drivers, each with its own characteristics.

1. Achievement: The individual is motivated by working challenges, which are difficult, but not impossible. Some failure is expected, and feedback is important.
2. Power - The individual is motivated by reputation, seeking not merely isolated wins but to be "the best"
3. Affiliation - The individual is motivated to establish, maintain, or repair friendly or affiliative relationships

4. Avoidance - Because the chance of failure is high, the individual is motivated by fear, and learns better when the tasks are easy.

In the example scenario, the golf professionals are certainly in the "achievement" category, but there is a catch. While the professionals may actually have been excited about the prospect of being paid to play golf with members, Chris's specific scoring requirement was more problematic. Chris had intended this to be a challenge, motivating the professionals to play seriously and try to shoot good scores. But by requiring the professionals to shoot par, Chris was setting the bar for success very high: each professional, while having passed the PAT, carried indexes of between four and six. Shooting par was a stretch, and the risk of failure was therefore high. This risk actually outweighed the potential reward, causing the professionals to decline the opportunity. As it turns out, a person high in achievement motivation will be de-motivated by a challenge that they feel is too great or too easy. In this case, shooting par was too great a challenge, and the fear of failure made the offer unattractive.

Had Chris understood the professionals' actual motivational driver, he and the professionals could have jointly set the goals, the challenge would have been accepted, and a mutually desirable outcome achieved. It is therefore important for managers, while crafting their motivational strategies, to take into account both the personalities and the skills of the individuals they seek to motivate, making sure to set achievable goals.

*MacDonald Niven, CCM, CCE is the general manager at La Rinconada Country Club in California and can be reached at (408) 402-7474 or via email: macniven09@gmail.com*