



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

The Tuba and Why Motivation is a Waste of Time **October 31, 2006**

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we examine why motivation is a waste of time.

I never wanted to play the tuba. I still don't want to play the tuba. And if you promised me the world, you know what? No, now you're wrong. I *would* play the tuba, but probably only for a while. I'd likely get bored, and then I'd give you your tuba and the world back. Obviously, some people enjoy playing the tuba. And I'm glad they do. The tuba adds that needed oomph to certain pieces of music. So, long live the tuba, but it won't be because of me.

So why the tuba? It's just a small example of how you truly couldn't motivate me to play the instrument. More importantly, you couldn't get me to *feel* motivated to play, no matter how hard you tried. You might coerce, cajole, coax, con, and even conspire to get me to play. But it wouldn't be for long, and it wouldn't be because I loved playing the tuba. I have the utmost respect for it. But that doesn't mean I like playing it.

If you got really creative, you could send me to a day-long tuba motivation seminar in one of those fancy hotel ballrooms, or better still, in a large indoor sports arena, where I'd feel "empowered" to live out the true tuba within me. We'd pump our fists in the air, and listen to charismatic world class thinkers whose lives were personally transformed by the tuba. They'd explain to us how playing such a grand instrument is so life-changing, and we'd leave with the conviction that tomorrow would be a new day for each of us, a day filled with tremendous potential because of our deep belief in the power of the instrument and the messages we'd heard that day. We'd then go home, wake up, and as we got dressed, wonder where we left that other sock: It's gotta be here somewhere. Life would return to the usual, sans tuba.

Motivation is a waste of time. You can't motivate me to do anything just as I can't motivate you to do anything. I can bribe you; promise you money, rewards, or "incentives" to encourage your behavior. But you know what? That gets so old so quickly. And you know what again? I really don't want to have to offer you something all the time in order to get you to do it. If I need something done, I should try and find someone who truly enjoys doing what I need to get done.

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And this is the very message we're hearing again and again from companies these days. "How do I get people to do the work they're paid to do?" And the answer is, you don't. They're the only ones who can determine if they'll do the work you've paid them to do. And you can forget about trying to "incent" (when did "incent" become a word?) someone to go above and beyond the call of duty. Now that gets truly expensive.

Look around in your organization, and you *know* who's doing the hard work and who's just getting by. The bell curve is alive and well in many organizations these days. And you're not going to make everyone high performers by creating the latest incentive plan. You may make the less-than-marginal somewhat marginal by doing so. But the truly outstanding performers are truly outstanding not because they're paid well (which they are and which they enjoy), but because they have the drive and they provide the effort on a continuous (the key word) basis to get great results. They like working hard; they like being challenged regularly. Yes, in some industries it *is* about the money, but scratch the surface and you'll see that it's all about the deal, about winning, about the challenge to accomplish something bigger than oneself. (The dollars are for keeping score.)

Get outside of Wall Street, and you'll see the same thing: Your high performers are high performers because they enjoy performing at a high level, in and of itself. They truly love the tuba, and they truly love playing it. Pure and simple. Once you pay them what they're worth (and you have to, because your competitors know their worth too), they'll provide the motivation themselves.

So what does that mean for you if you run a business, a division, a region, a department, a team? Stop trying to motivate. Start trying to find those that are self-motivated and self-managing. And then get out of their way. You'll be glad you did.

Now where did I put my lederhosen?

You can access this and past 60-Second Emails™, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via the following link to our web site: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

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