

The Truth about Anyone - Achieving Natural Motivation

By John Vamos

You know how they say you only remember the good times? Well, it's at least partly true. And it's just as well that remembering works this way, because our character is strongly influenced by our memories, good and bad. Our natural tendency to remember the good times also reveals the truth about ourselves. Therefore experiences we judge as favourable, and remember with joy long after the event, are invaluable indicators of what we truly like doing.

Configuring a job to include as many as possible of those 'natural likes' makes the job truly motivating for the person doing it: durably, not momentarily; naturally, not artificially.

The ineffectiveness of motivational events

Does such emphasis on natural motivation contradict the usual approach employed by the motivation industry? Frankly, it does, as their motivational tools – both program content and setting - are simply material delivered at special events designed merely to stir the emotions.

Emotions are made to be stirred. It's certainly uplifting to sing the national anthem at an international sporting event, cheer your horse down the straight or be swept along by a brilliant film or novel. But like all moods, these come and then go. And when they go, so go the motivation: like acting on whatever you promised you would during such emotional events.

Missing the clues

The stirring stories of Abraham Lincoln initially losing election after election, or Roger Bannister finally running the four-minute mile miss the point. Such persistent people were highly motivated by doing what they liked. But that does not mean we can achieve the same thing by trying to be like them. The real message in those stories emerge if we asked: what would have happened if you forced Abraham Lincoln to try to run the four minute mile? Or Roger Bannister to try and run for political office.

These great leaders would then be just as de-motivated and miserable as the people you know who are trying to be a square peg in a round hole. Finding your real likes is the key message of this article.

Things people like doing are the ones genuinely motivating, and it's a motivation that does not come and go with mood changes.

Achieving *Natural Motivation*

Ever met someone who doesn't seem to care? They care all right, just not about what they're doing now! Recent insights into job design show how to re-fit the task to the truth about the person doing it. When you get it right, it taps into an endless source of natural motivation!



So how do you pinpoint natural motivation? They are revealed in memories, particularly childhood memories. There, a person's inner voice was natural. And they had not developed habits of thought based on what society or their parents expected.

Digging for gold

Once you start digging for memories of experiences you found enjoyable, satisfying, rewarding, encouraging, uplifting and fulfilling, patterns start to emerge. These patterns can then be applied to job design and recruitment, with sustainable benefits. Simply put, people do something better if they like doing it.

But since work is seldom the same as play, it would seem difficult to design too many likeable elements into any job. Wrong! Workers don't necessarily need to like the activity if they like the subject matter of their job. Or they don't need to like the subject if they like the outcomes - and here lies the secret...

Applying past to present

Try this yourself before encouraging existing and prospective staff to do the same. If you have a BCS business coach, do the exercise with them.

Part A is to recall your earliest and most significant memories of any experiences or accomplishments you found satisfying (e.g. captained soccer team, built a cubby house, learned the clarinet, or overcame a disability). List and rate them using the measures as guidance. Do this with as many favourable past achievements as it takes to average out into recurring patterns.

Part B is to repeat the exercise with your present job (or any job being analysed). Compare the job analysis with your analysis of satisfying memories, which tells the truth about you. Mismatches call for some highly informed job-design and/or recruiting decisions.

1. Subject Matter

In the recollection of a satisfying past achievement (or the present job being analysed) how much are you enjoying the subject itself? Part A - Example from past experience: you may have hated practising the piano but loved music. The subject would then score highly even if the process does not.

Part B - Example from present job: a veterinary assistant may hate cleaning animal cages (the process) but love animals (the subject).

Least important 1 2 3 4 5 Most important

2. Process

Example: Wendy is a successful oil company rep. She has no interest in oils and greases and has never worked on anything mechanical. But she loves travel,



working outdoors and meeting a range of people. She therefore scores the process highly even if the subject matter scores low.

Least important 1 2 3 4 5 Most important

3. Outcome

Example: Learning to speak without a lisp or stutter was frustrating for you (process) and you hated even thinking about speech defects (subject). But you were delighted when you could talk normally. The outcome therefore scores high even if the subject and process do not.

Least important 1 2 3 4 5 Most important

4. Leader vs. Follower

This is not a score but a point on a continuum. Neither end of the scale is wrong: leaders need followers and vice versa. What's wrong is to fail to understand which point on the scale is the truth about you.

Followers 1 2 3 4 5 Leader

5. Solo vs. Group

Often confused with leader and follower, this continuum is more a measure of whether you like to work alone or function best in a team.

Solo 1 2 3 4 5 Group

6. Familiar vs. New

Again, there is nothing right or wrong about being at either end of this scale. Some people like to master their field, which means sticking with familiar subjects. Others are pioneers and want the issues to be new and constantly changing.

Familiar 1 2 3 4 5 New

