

# WE MAINTAIN OUR MACHINES BETTER THAN WE MAINTAIN OUR PEOPLE

By Paul Herr

According to Gallup, only 29% of employees in the U.S. care about their work. If this were a college exam, 29% would equate to an “F.” I can therefore state with some confidence that modern “best practices” earn failing grades in “Employee Motivation 101.”

Let’s compare how companies treat their manufacturing equipment to how they treat their employees—their human capital. The difference is enlightening.

Imagine that we are standing in a factory manager’s office. Now let’s ask the manager a basic question, “Is your machinery operating at its rated capacity or is it malfunctioning?” The manager would calmly turn to his computer, pull up a few graphs, and answer confidently, “Everything is functioning according to specifications.”

*“The sad fact is, we treat our manufacturing equipment far better than we treat our employees”*

Now let’s ask the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a service business the same question, “How is your human-capital functioning?” The startled COO would answer, “Huh?” According to Gallup, the financial fallout from this oversight is measured in legions of disengaged employees and in trillions of dollars of lost productivity.

The factory manager has an advantage over the COO. Skilled technicians are assigned to monitor and maintain the plant’s machinery. The machines themselves are outfitted with sensors that track key operating parameters. These parameters are plotted second-by-second on control charts to monitor whether the machinery is operating as expected. Whenever these parameters drift outside of their normal ranges, the machines are stopped, and preventative maintenance is performed. The factory manager, in other words, has far more diagnostic information than the COO.

Let’s dig a little deeper into this disparity between the way our manufacturing equipment is treated and the way our employees are treated, because it leads to a startling conclusion—modern corporations don’t understand human nature, don’t understand the motivational engine that drives high

performance, fail to monitor the motivational engine, and fail to perform preventative-maintenance to keep employees operating at their best.

Just as manufacturing equipment is powered by engines, so are human beings. I've studied the human motivational engine for 30 years, and I've developed a clear conception of what it looks like. This engine has ten "cylinders"—five that regulate our biological survival (biologic appetites like hunger and thirst) and five that regulate our primal social needs to innovate, master the survival skills of our tribe, achieve goals, work cooperatively as a team and feel safe and secure (the motivational cylinder dealing with cooperation equates directly to employee engagement). In my book, "Primal Management," I show where these motivational "cylinders" reside in the brain, which neurotransmitters regulate them, and how human beings malfunction if any of these vital survival mechanisms are damaged by disease or injury. I also explain how to get the motivational horsepower to go up by working harmoniously with the engine.

### **WHAT'S THE HORSEPOWER OF YOUR ENGINE?**



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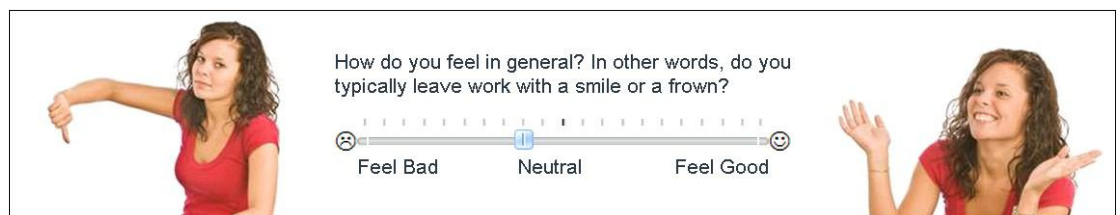
The output signals from the motivational engine are motivating feelings of pleasure and pain. An engine metaphor is appropriate because these rewarding and painful feelings move us. They get us up in the morning, move us from Point-A to Point-B during the course of our day, and put us to bed at night. The truth is, we are pleasure-driven creatures and companies need to come to grips with this basic fact.

It should be self-evident that humans are motivated to seek rewarding experiences and to avoid painful ones. If employees cannot find these rewarding feelings in their work, then they will focus their energies outside of work in rewarding activities like sports and hobbies. If employees can't find pleasure naturally in their lives, then they will often turn to addictive drugs to find these pleasures unnaturally.

Human beings, just like factory machines, are equipped with sensors that measure our state-of-repair. The output signals from these sensors are motivating feelings of pleasure and pain. When we feel good, we are operating at our rated capacity, and when we feel bad, we are malfunctioning. I developed a survey to capture these pleasurable and painful feelings and summarize them as motivational horsepower. I recommend that companies measure their motivational horsepower monthly and plot the results on a

control chart to determine whether their employees are functioning optimally or malfunctioning.

If the motivational horsepower is positive, it means that employees experience intrinsic pleasure in their work that is equivalent to a monetary bonus that enhances motivation and productivity. If the horsepower is negative, employees find it painful coming to work, which is equivalent to a reduction in their monetary pay. I propose that motivational horsepower is the single most important parameter a company can measure, yet nobody does so. If companies can get their horsepower to go up, I argue, then every other desirable operational, financial and HR metric should go up with it.



*Screen Shot of Final Question of The Horsepower Survey™*

At this point our hypothetical COO might protest, “I’m not as clueless as you suggest. I measure the horsepower of my motivational engine with a yearly employee-engagement survey.” To this I would respond, “Measuring motivation annually just doesn’t cut it. If your engine is malfunctioning, do you really want to wait a year to find out? Measuring motivation annually is like measuring cash-flow annually. It is downright un-businesslike.”

To be honest, we shouldn’t be too critical of our COO. Motivation is a murky and complex subject. Even the scientific community had a muddled understanding of the motivational engine until the advent of powerful brain imaging devices like PET scanners and functional MRIs that allowed us to peer into the brain and see the motivational engine in action. The bottom line however is clear—if you want to improve productivity and reduce costs, you need to tap into human nature’s pleasure-fueled engine.