



## Mobley's Musings: When motivation wanes

A client told me her employees were grumbling about not feeling motivated. Some said COVID-19 was stressing them out. Some were preoccupied with family issues. Everyone had their excuses. And they felt being unmotivated was an acceptable justification for not getting their work done.

My client, Stacey, is a strong leader who's passionate about her work and driven to achieve her goals. She admits she isn't always motivated, but in those instances what she relies on is discipline. Whether it's exercising, cleaning or tackling a difficult task, her self-discipline pushes her through any malaise so she can get things done. As a result, she is extremely successful.

It occurred to me that a good interview question for potential applicants is to ask, "How do you motivate yourself to take on a difficult task?" Their answers offer a window into what they value and separates the people who make excuses from the strong performers. Job applicants often describe themselves as self-motivated, but if you dig deeper, you may uncover what really drives them.

### Sandy



### Ask Sandy

#### Coming into meetings hot can burn you

A number of clients have asked me for help improving their communication abilities. Two of them described meetings where they have "come in hot" — that is, they were so passionate about an issue they talked about it for 15 or 20 minutes without stopping or giving anyone else a chance to talk. As a result, people in the meeting felt lectured to and resisted their ideas. Is it bad to be passionate?

When I asked what they did to prepare for meetings, they looked at me strangely. That was my first clue that "coming in hot" may really mean winging it and trusting the sheer power of their afterburners to persuade people. Clearly, we needed to talk about the three main elements of meeting preparation.

To prepare for any meeting speakers should ask themselves:

- 1) Am I centered and in a positive frame of mind?
- 2) Do I know what my audience wants or needs and how best to engage them?
- 3) Have I organized my content in a way that will create buy-in from my audience?

Not surprisingly, my clients admitted they don't do any of these things before making a presentation. Instead, they focus on their message and dive in before they forget what they want to say. I gave them some breathing and centering exercises they could do to help center themselves prior to making a presentation. And we talked about the importance of knowing the audience — who they are, how they prefer to receive information, whether they are intuitive or analytical, their frame of mind. While getting this information may not be easy, the more a speaker knows about the audience, the better they can position the message.

I asked my clients how they could tell whether their audience understood their message and how they felt about it. Again, they shrugged off my question. It seemed to them that communication is achieved simply by speaking. In fact, communication is achieved only when the audience hears, understands, and processes the speaker's message.

To be sure they are communicating and not just speaking, presenters should always be assessing their audience's engagement. I showed my clients some TED Talks on YouTube and asked them to watch the audience members. They could tell the audience was enjoying a talk by their expressions (smiling and nodding, for example) and body language (sitting up straight or leaning in, making and holding eye contact).

Then I showed videos taken at conferences and had them pick out indicators of a presenter who was not connecting with the audience, such as attendees staring off in the distance, hands propping up heads, closed eyes and blank or frowning faces. I gave my clients an assignment to observe people in meetings over the next few weeks and gauge their level of interest. As they practiced it became easier for them to read peoples' faces and assess how they felt about the speaker or topic.

It was time for my clients to apply these lessons ahead of their next meeting. They made sure they were centered, knew what the audience cared about, and framed their presentation to address the audience's needs. Instead of coming in hot, they slowed down so they could gauge the audience's engagement. When speakers check in with their audience, they're often perceived as more credible and open to others. And, if the audience seems confused, bored, or agitated, they can course-correct

My clients found that being prepared for meetings reduced their nervousness and helped them project confidence. As they aligned their messages to what the audience cared about, their ideas garnered more support. They continue to be passionate about their ideas, and they've learned to harness their fire and use it to spark their audience's interest.

According to the Project Management Institute, each hour of planning saves four hours in implementation. I don't know the statistics, but my gut tells me the time spent preparing for meetings delivers a significant return in achieving your communication goal, not to mention boosting how you are perceived.

**Learning for Leaders:** Learn to read the room to gauge the effectiveness of your communication, making adjustments if necessary.

**Coaches Corner:** Before they go into meetings, help your clients think through what they want to achieve and the best way to position the topic to achieve their goals.

If you have questions, you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to [sandy@learningadvantageinc.com](mailto:sandy@learningadvantageinc.com)



## Love and the Bottom Line

A few years ago my colleague Lori Zukin and I presented a series of workshops titled "Love and the Bottom Line." Our premise was that being kind and caring toward employees not only doesn't cost a lot but actually increases profitability for organizations.

We began by asking participants to describe the factors that brought out their best work. They identified:

- Feeling supported and encouraged by management
- Having supportive co-workers
- Having a mission or goal that was meaningful
- Doing work that played to their strengths
- Feeling like what they did mattered

Then we asked them to recall instances when having these factors in place benefited their organization's bottom line. To make sure participants were thinking about both qualitative and quantitative benefits, I told them about my time at Hewlett Packard when I was the head of Executive Development.

Our team was asked to help re-frame the marketing function at HP so that the Marketing department would be thought of as an equal partner with the Research and Development and the Manufacturing departments. Many at HP had a "paint it blue and send it through" mentality when it came to marketing, as if it were simply a matter of packaging. We began at the top, bringing in Harvard and Stanford Business School professors to brief executives on aspects of marketing they may not have considered, such as market research and data analytics. We explained that getting HP to value the marketing function and involve the department in strategic decisions would require bringing deep marketing expertise into the company and conducting company-wide training on the role the Marketing department can play in HP's success.

HP leadership demonstrated their commitment to the plan by appointing a Senior Vice President of Marketing to join the leadership team alongside senior vice presidents in R & D, Manufacturing, and Finance. My team was tasked with developing a 10-module marketing course that would be taught by internal leaders. HP leadership underscored their commitment by requiring all executives in all HP divisions to complete the training program.

Operating under a tight timeline, our team felt excited, scared, and challenged by the opportunity. Support from leadership was clear and our team members supported each other at every step. If one person needed help, we all jumped in to support each other. We worked late nights and weekends to hit the deadline.

We were thrilled by the success of the reframing effort within HP, but the real success was that HP sales increased significantly. HP's products had always been designed by engineers and narrowly marketed to engineers. But with the Marketing Department now in a more strategic position, a new marketing campaign was created that featured ordinary people asking, "What if..." and using their HP computers to bring their visions to reality. This one change made all the difference in the company's future and our team was overjoyed to be part of it.

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