

# STAFF



## MYTH OR Magic?

BY LINDA DREVENSTEDT, RDH, MS

Is your staff motivated? By what? Moreover, what exactly is "motivation?" According to psychologist Russell Geen, motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of human behavior.

For more on this topic, go to [www.dentaleconomics.com](http://www.dentaleconomics.com) and search using the following key words: *staff motivation, human behavior, myth or magic, Linda Drevenstedt.*

### Let's start with a quick motivation test. Truth or Myth?

- 1. Money is a universal motivator.
- 2. Some people are unmotivated.
- 3. You can motivate other people.
- 4. Fear is a universal motivator.

- 5. Your ability to motivate the team is critical to your success.
- 6. Staff leaves a practice because of poor motivation.
- 7. I know the top staff motivators.
- 8. I know the top staff motivation busters.
- 9. I am a good motivator.

You'll find the answers as we proceed. First, let's bust one myth: all people *are* motivated. This statement seems untrue when you are trying to motivate a team. The motivation truth is:

**People do things for *their* reasons, not yours.**

## Staff motivation — myth or magic?

### Maslow and motivation

What motivates you, most often, will not motivate your team. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs below illustrates one model of motivation.



This chart is a motivation reference point. Dentists, who earn seven to 10 times (or more) income than their staff members, are higher up Maslow's ladder. The dentist may be motivated by the “be all you can be” self-actualization level. He or she may spend time and money taking courses to create the best cosmetic, implant, or restorative practice.

The dentist wants staff members to attend courses, develop their skills, and be attentive to the patients and details of their jobs. The truth, often, is that the staff member's husband just left her with two children to support, she has an ill parent to care for, or has a child with problems at school.

Your staff may be on the first or second rung — survival. They do what it takes to keep their job, but it may be at the minimum level of effort. They are not at the “be all they can be” level. The lower-rung motivators are money and job security. The security need may be for a more flexible work schedule to allow time to care for a hospitalized parent, for example, or to work with a child who is having trouble in school.

Many team members are motivated by belonging. They are interested in working with people they like. When they like the team, it becomes a second family. Unfortunately, this can turn against you. The team can become a little soap opera. Everyone can become so involved in the lives and loves of each other that they pay less attention to the details of their jobs.

To motivate this team, set clear guidelines for what are appropriate times for discussing personal issues and what are inappropriate times. Then, be sure to reward good behaviors. Have lunch brought in when you have a rough morning so they can enjoy each other. Find time for celebration lunches.

You will be truly lucky if you have 20% of your team on the recognition or self-actualization rung. They are the “10” staff members who are self-motivated and form the core of a dream team. Enjoy them for as long as they stay. They are often high achievers, and they will move on if you

do not have a stimulating place to work. But, remember — they need to be challenged on a regular basis or they will become unmotivated.

You, by now, can see the “people do things for their own reasons” theme of motivation.

### Personality and behavioral profiling

The next important area for understanding motivation is the “round peg in a square hole” theory. This requires study of personality styles or behavior profiling. There are many models to study, but DiSC® and social styles seem to be prevalent in dentistry. The in-depth study of one of these models yields great rewards in your ability to create an environment for motivation to happen. You'll need the knowledge of personality styles to know what you're getting with potential hires. You need to know if you have a behavioral job fit.

For example, your high “I” expressive hygienist will “sell” your dentistry if you can focus her natural desire to communicate on your dentistry and not on social chit chat. You need to know your high “S” amiable dental assistant may not be a good chairside treatment closer. It is important to have a high “C” analytical at the helm of insurance and collections. If you tend to be a slow-paced clinician, having a “D” driver in your lead chairside can keep you moving and keep her motivated. And, you need to know your own behavior style to create an environment where your motivation can stay high.

#### The following are the prime staff motivators:

- ✓ Respect
- ✓ Meaningful work
- ✓ A positive work environment
- ✓ Clear communication
- ✓ Trust
- ✓ Good pay

The opposite of prime motivators are **motivation busters**. Here are the top seven I have gathered from years of listening to staff:

#### ✗ Favoritism of one employee over another

This includes letting some employees get away with poor performance without any repercussions. The good ones think “why bother?” Staff wants fair treatment of all team members.

#### ✗ No or infrequent salary reviews

One top reason that staff members leave a practice is because of the long gap between raises. Other reasons are minimal benefits and low pay. To have a champion team, you need to pay champion wages. Use any sports team model that you care to as an analogy.

#### ✗ Running late

When staff members see the dentist coming in late or

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spending patient care time on the computer or phone, they get ticked off. They have children to pick up and families who expect them to be home on time. They become very demotivated when they get out late and they know there was a preventable cause.

### ✗ Lack of appreciation

Staff members want acknowledgement for their efforts, and they want to know that what they do is important and appreciated.

### ✗ Procrastination on decisions

For example, staff members have to plan their vacations. They need to arrange sitters and childcare and become very frustrated when dentists do not have out-of-the-office time planned in advance.

### ✗ Lack of appropriate feedback

When I interview staff, they all want to know what is expected of them in order to do a good job. The “honeymoon” period of new hires wears off in three to six months. If the new staff member is not trained and given feedback about her performance, she will *assume* she is doing a good job. Existing staff want to know if their performance is not up to par. The prime motivator of champion teams is *feedback!* Why does a champion like Tiger Woods have a coach?!

### ✗ Burned-out boss

Everybody occasionally has a bad day with family or money challenges, but your staff needs you, the boss, to be positive and motivated. An unmotivated boss leads directly to an unmotivated team. Your practice’s money challenges are not their concern, and it creates insecurity when you share that dirty laundry. See paragraph two, sentence two.

*“To move the world, we must first move ourselves.”*

— Socrates

**Fear is a motivator, but it is a poor one.** Healthy, motivated staff will leave a fear-based environment. Staff who stay in a fear-based environment often have a victim mentality and will never be true superstars. Remember, people can quit work and still show up every day. Intimidating

your staff is a huge motivation buster, especially if the verbal correction is in front of patients. Blow-ups do *not* motivate.

**Money is a motivator.** Everybody works for a paycheck. Your staff wants things for their families just as you do. Money has a place in the staff motivation mix. First and foremost, staff wants to be paid a fair and competitive wage. No amount of perks makes up for a noncompetitive wage. Annually, as the boss, you should research your local economy, calculate your practice growth percentage, and check the competition for dental staff. Find out the fair, competitive wage for the position, talent, and longevity of each dental staff member. Each staff member deserves time with you to review what raises are appropriate and, if not, why not.

**Staff members want to share in the success of the practice.** However, any constant bonus system will soon become an entitlement. Back to Psychology 101, remember Pavlov’s experiments. The reward that kept the behavior constant the longest was the intermittent reward, not the constant reward. So mix it up. Have a reward based on different criteria each quarter. Reward and celebrate the milestones of your practice; for example, your biggest production or collection day, the most sealants or bleaching procedures in a month, or the most units of crown and bridge done in a month, week, or day. Be creative. Ask staff what rewards *they* like. One practice has a grab-bag staff meeting during one lunch period after the end of a month. Each staff member gets to “grab” from a bag of different prizes such as dinner certificates, Target/Wal-Mart certificates, \$100 bills, or other shopping certificates.

**Motivation is not a mystery, and yes, it can be magic.** If you want to be a better motivator, you will need to spend some time studying the topic. I have a reading list on motivation that I would be glad to e-mail you. Send your request to [Linda@drevenstedt.com](mailto:Linda@drevenstedt.com). The main take-away idea is that it is up to you, as the leader, to create an environment where staff *can* be motivated, fired up, and excited about working for you. It all starts at the *top!* **DE**

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