

Motivating Staff Through Career Anchors

Motivating employees is one of the most commonly sought out areas of management and leadership development. Coaches often find that they are frequently asked the question, “How do I keep people motivated and productive?”

If this applies to you, one approach you may wish to consider is motivation through career anchors.

The concept of career anchors was first developed by Edgar Schein, a Sloan Fellows Professor of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Schein, Edgar H 1990 *Career Anchors – Discovering Your Real Values*). Schein is a specialist in organisational psychology and career dynamics.

People are primarily motivated by one of eight anchors, or priorities that define how they see themselves and how they see their work.

Understanding these anchors may be particularly useful to do two crucial things:

- Tailor your communication style to fit employees’ individual needs.
- Drive improved performance by choosing the most effective way to recognise and reward accomplishments.

The underlying benefit is that you will be able to contribute to employees feeling more valued and motivated in general and all the subsequent benefits that brings.

The Eight Career Anchors

These eight career anchors are defined by Schein as follows:

- **Technical / Functional Competence** – This kind of person likes being good at something and will work to become a guru or expert. They like to be challenged and then use their skill to meet the challenge, doing the job properly and better than almost anyone else. Money and promotions do not matter as much to this group as compared with the opportunity to hone their craft.

- **General Managerial Competence** – Unlike technical/functional people, these folks want to be managers (and not just to get more money, although this may be used as a metric of success). They like problem-solving and dealing with other people. They thrive on responsibility. To be successful, they also need emotional competence. This person also wants to learn how to do many functions, synthesize information from multiple sources, supervise increasingly larger groups of people and use considerable interpersonal skills.
- **Autonomy / Independence** – These people have a primary need to work under their own rules and steam. They avoid standards and prefer to work alone. They don't want to be told what to do and freedom rather than prestige is their goal.
- **Security / Stability** – Security-focused people seek stability and continuity as a primary factor of their lives. They want a predictable environment, one in which tasks and policies are clearly defined. They avoid risks and are generally people who stay a long time in their jobs as they strongly identify with their organisation regardless of their level of responsibility.
- **Entrepreneurial Creativity** – These people like to invent things, be creative and most of all, to run their own businesses (or run something on the side from their primary employment). They differ from those who seek autonomy in that they will share the workload. They find ownership very important. They easily get bored. Wealth, for them, is a sign of success.
- **Service / Dedication to a Cause** – Service-oriented people are driven by how they can help other people more than using their talents (which may fall in other areas). The need to focus work around a specific set of values is a major issue for employees with this career anchor. They may work in public services or in areas such as nursing, Human Resources, training and coaching.
- **Pure Challenge** – People driven by challenge seek constant stimulation and difficult problems that they can tackle and solve. Such people will change jobs when the current one gets boring and their career history can be quite varied. They seek out the ever-tougher challenge to conquer.

- **Lifestyle** – Those who are focused first on lifestyle look at their whole pattern of living. They organise themselves around their private lives and their most pressing concern is for their job to give them the freedom to balance those concerns with their work. They may even take long periods off work in which to indulge in personal passions and objectives.

If you would like to check out Schein's *Career Anchors: Self Assessment Workbook*, it can be ordered from Amazon.com through the following link:

[Link to Schein's Self Assessment Workbook on Amazon](#)

Motivating Based on Career Anchors

Once you have identified, or feel that you have identified your individual staff member's career anchor, you can then determine the best communication strategies and recognition and performance motivators.

Here are some tips edited from an article written by Anne Field, where she provided communication and recognition strategies in the *Harvard Management Communication Letter* (September 2003).

- **Technical / Functional Competence**

How to communicate – These individuals want to be honoured for what they know. It's important to appeal to them as experts and try to encourage others to approach them the same way.

Also, in conversation with someone with a technical/functional competence anchor, if you know something about the field in question, display your knowledge. But if you don't, don't try to fake it as these people will probably be able to see right through you and potentially lose respect for you.

Best type of recognition - These employees probably won't care that much if they can't get a raise. But they will become demoralised if they feel they can't keep refining their expertise or if they fear they won't be able to keep on being the best. So make sure they can go to conferences, meetings, and other places where they're able to hone their craft and keep up with the latest developments.

- **General Managerial Competence**

How to communicate - The people in this group may be the easiest to talk to, thanks to their finely tuned interpersonal skills. They know how to network, they're good at organisational politics, and they can read verbal and nonverbal cues. But in an atmosphere of limited resources, they also may be the hardest to please.

Because they're likely interested in how their performance fits into the organisation as a whole, not just in the pure exercise of their expertise, make sure to discuss their work in terms of performance-based, bottom-line results. And ask their input on supervisory matters, so they feel they're stretching their managerial muscles.

Best type of recognition - These people really want more money and a promotion. Since you might not be able to provide those things, you need to look for other ways to enrich their jobs. For example, find big projects for them to supervise or invite them to attend important meetings. Send them to seminars and workshops where they'll learn to advance their skills. And see about giving them a more prestigious title.

In addition, look for secondary career anchors they might respond to.

- **Autonomy / Independence**

How to communicate - These employees want to be on their own, so the less said, the better. Agree on a timetable for checking in with each other—and stick to it. And be prepared not to hear from them, even at the appointed time.

Best type of recognition - In some environments, you may feel the need to interfere more than you might otherwise. Resist the temptation to do so. The most effective recognition you can give these people is the chance to take charge of an opportunity themselves, and let them run with it.

- **Security / Stability**

How to communicate - People with this career anchor need to hear from you early and often. That means checking in frequently, so they're not left hanging. If there are rumours of cutbacks, keep communicating, even if you don't know the real story. Then come back again, even if nothing has changed.

Additionally, make a point of talking to them about the importance of life-long learning and keeping their skills up to date. If you don't urge them to take action, they won't.

Best type of recognition - You probably can't give them what they want: job security. But you can make the most of their loyalty to the organization and take steps to show appreciation for it, like taking them out to lunch or organizing a departmental picnic.

- **Entrepreneurial / Creativity**

How to communicate - Encourage them to keep coming up with new ideas, no matter how wacky they may sound at first. And consistently ask them about projects they'd like to take on. Hold regular brainstorming sessions. These people tend to be highly enthusiastic, so try to match that upbeat quality, too. Challenge them with goals, not specific assignments, and leave them to get on with the job.

The more you let them figure out, the happier they'll be.

Best type of recognition - They also tend to be fairly self-centred. And they want money, not for its own sake, but as a visible sign they've accomplished something big. If you can't give them the money, you can provide public recognition as well as the reward they crave most — the continued opportunity to create their own projects. Entrepreneurs can be extremely sensitive to slights and are not very good at taking criticism, so give them plenty of public praise when it's merited, and criticize them in private when necessary.

- **Sense of Service**

How to communicate - Don't just talk about the work. Focus on the aspect of the job that they most value. And look for projects that match their area of concern. Clarify the connection between the work and some loftier ideal. Let them know how they'll contribute to the greater good by doing the job at hand.

Best type of recognition - What they want most is to be able to continue working for their cause. By explicitly providing those opportunities, you'll give them what they need. You might also find that employees come up with unexpected ways to integrate their values into their work.

- **Pure Challenge**

How to communicate - These people tend to be confrontational, often exuding a sense of urgency about the challenge of the moment and how to go about meeting it. As a result, you may need to push back a bit and clarify priorities. Insist on more explanation, when necessary, and on making sure the particular solution is the right one.

Raise the bar for success as high as you like; they'll thrive on it. Don't make anything too easy for them.

Best type of recognition - If you keep throwing challenges their way, they'll know they've done good work. When you see they're about to finish a project, try to find another for them to get started on immediately. Allow them a certain amount of time during the day to work on a particularly challenging assignment in addition to their regular duties.

For these people, the challenge is the reward, so don't go overboard with words of praise. Just get them going on the next job.

- **Lifestyle**

How to communicate - You need to be direct and to-the-point. Discuss what the employee needs and how best to organize schedules to accommodate their requests. Make sure the requirements of the job are clearly spelled out, together with the rewards for doing well and the penalties for doing poorly.

These people work to live, they don't live to work, so don't expect them to go beyond the basic requirements or job description. Make sure everything that you need from them is on the table.

Best type of recognition - Working out a flexible schedule is the most effective reward. Just as they don't expect to do more than the job's minimal requirements, they don't expect rewards beyond the salary. So give them the chance to maximize their non-work hours when they do well and work efficiently. Get them to focus on getting the job done, not putting in a set number of hours, and reward them with time away from work.

To read the full original article by Anne Fields from the Harvard Business School online archives, please click [here](#).

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