

Motivation in Volunteers: What Drives People to Provide Free Labor?

Shaan Shahabuddin

Ph.D. Student, Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications
Texas A&M University
Agriculture and Life Sciences Building, 600 John Kimbrough Blvd, College Station, TX, USA
77843-2116
Tel. 832.875.0701 * FAX 979.845.6296 * Email: sss10819@gmail.com

Zubaida Qamar

Ph.D. Student, Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences
Texas A&M University
Cater Mattil Hall, 373 Olsen Blvd., College Station, TX, USA 77843-2116
Tel. 607.434.5060 * FAX 979.862.6842 * Email: qamaz25@tamu.edu

Abstract

In his book “Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us”, Daniel Pink describes that motivation at work is achieved through three processes: Autonomy (power to control one’s work), Mastery (productivity and improvement in one’s task), and Purpose (sense of belonging to a system greater than one’s self). Pink states that if these three processes are achieved, then individuals will dedicate more time to their jobs, will work more diligently on their assigned duties, and companies will benefit from the efficiency of its employees. The current paper applies the concepts from Pink’s book to volunteer programs by outlining how volunteer resource managers can improve morale and character of its volunteers.

Key Words: volunteers, leadership, motivation, drive

Donald Trump, the billion-dollar businessman, entrepreneur, and investor has quoted that money was never his motivation when he began working; the real passion and excitement he received was from playing the game (Trump & Schwartz, 2004). Some people might disagree with Donald Trump and view the game of life having the sole purpose of achieving money despite its hurdles of achieving a college degree and obtaining a successful career. Human beings are unique in their prospects of the future and they value different motivations for success.

Ryan and Deci (2000b) define motivation as being moved to do something; someone who is “energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated” (p.

54). Motivation can be categorized as either intrinsic, the act of doing an act because it is inherently enjoyable, or extrinsic, the act of doing an act because it leads to a desirable outcome. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, it was found that Americans are more motivated by extrinsic sources, such as money, promotions, or pay increases (Pink, 2009). Even in today’s society, college students believe that if they are paid more for a job then their job performance will increase in both quantity and quality. Pink (2009) states that “carrot and stick” methods of motivation (i.e., extrinsic motivation) are outdated and that society should rather focus on having employees to find motivation in their jobs. Pink (2009) references a laboratory

experiment where college students were forced to complete a boring and mundane task of clicking on icons on a computer screen and dragging the icons to a box. The students were divided into three groups: no reward, reward per hour, and reward per icon. The results of the study found that the group that was paid by the hour performed the worst and the group that was not given a reward performed the best. The reason for this outcome shows that people not awarded for completing a task begin believing that they are doing the task because it is fun and enjoyable. In comparison, the other groups reason that they are completing the task due to the reward.

In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Pink (2009) proposes a new theory of motivation that is based on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Pink also suggests that this theory should be adopted by organizations in modern jobs. The new theory of motivation has three main components that need to be implemented in order to have employee's complete tasks at an optimum performance: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. "Autonomy" provides employees with freedom to choose what time they begin their task, how they complete their assignments, whom they can collaborate with, and what tasks they are able to perform. "Mastery" occurs when employees are able to improve on a meaningful task that is assigned in an environment where the tasks are neither overly difficult nor simple. Employee "purpose" is filled when they understand how their individual role assists with the organizations goal, and when the employee feels that their task duties are for a greater cause to benefit others.

In associating Pink's (2009) new theory of motivation to volunteers, it is imperative that a few guidelines must be met, depending upon the situation. First, it is

ideal if volunteers have a degree of autonomy in their tasks. Even though individuals are volunteering, it is suggested that volunteers should be able to choose the appropriate times to come in and the amount of hours that they will volunteer each week, considering the organization's goals in mind. If volunteers have more flexibility with their schedules, then they will be able to handle their duties for their careers and personal relationships as well as their duties for the volunteer organization. It is recommended that volunteers should also be able to choose the specific tasks that they would like to perform, keeping the needs of the company in consideration, by working closest with the volunteer resource manager. It is understandable that during some situations the organization might have a surplus of volunteers who would prefer to work on a similar task because it provides the most nourishment (e.g., working with children), but have to end up working on a task that they dislike (e.g., cleaning up after events). However if time and resources permit, it is suggested that volunteers should be assigned to a duty that they enjoy. For "mastery", volunteers should be able to set and meet challenges. When volunteering at the food bank, it is good for a group of graduate students to try and outperform a group of undergraduate students, and vice versa. This friendly competition will also create an exciting atmosphere allowing the groups to behave more like a team by helping each other out. Volunteers can achieve "purpose" if they are informed about how their participation and help is making a difference to the organization. If a person is told that volunteering for only three hours a week at a food bank can help provide enough food to feed 300 families, the volunteer will understand that their assistance is making a difference to others.

Aside from Pink's (2009) theory of motivation, extrinsic sources of motivation

may also be helpful if they are received at the correct time and show appreciation. Volunteer research managers should make volunteers feel that their effort and dedication are being recognized if the volunteers are provided with certificates of appreciation, plaques, trophies, "thank you" cards, and gift cards. These extrinsic sources of motivation are unique because volunteers are assumed to not strive for these rewards but rather as a means for recognition. Volunteer resource managers can also depict their appreciation for the volunteers by posting pictures on the organization website and social network group (i.e., Facebook). When people see that there is a picture of them, or a group picture of the volunteers, or a picture of the volunteers while they are performing their duties, then they will feel that they are having a purposeful experience as it ties in with recognition

It is a difficult task to inspire people because everyone has their own set of motivations. There are different motivators and barriers that people consider when deciding on a task. It is even more difficult to motivate volunteers because they are not

provided with extrinsic motivation and are performing tasks due to passion for the field. Hence, it is suggested that volunteer resource managers use Pink's (2009) theory of motivation as well as some extrinsic rewards to show appreciation to the volunteer.

References

- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York, NY: Riverheads Books.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67.
- Trump, D., & Schwartz, T. (2004). *The art of the deal*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

About the Authors

Shaan Shahabuddin has a Bachelors and Masters degree in Psychology and is currently pursuing his PhD in Leadership from Texas A&M University. His research focuses on leadership, risk-taking, emotions, anticipation, persuasion, and memory. Shaan works as an Adjunct Psychology Professor at Blinn College in Bryan, Texas and has presented numerous lectures on decision-making, diversity, and psychology. After graduation, Shaan hopes to obtain a career in academia where he can continue teaching and conducting research.

Zubaida Qamar has a B.S. in Dietetics with a pre-medicine concentration from State University of New York, College at Oneonta and a M.S. in Nutrition Sciences from Texas A&M University. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Human Nutrition from Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on nutrition education in diverse populations and psychosocial factors, particularly motivators and barriers, affecting people in making choices regarding nutrition. She is also a recipient of multiple awards and honors including teaching awards. After graduation, Zubaida hopes to obtain a career in academia to continue teaching and research.