# DISCOVERING THE SECRET OF INCENTIVES THAT WORK

How to respond to different personality types in the workplace

By Beverly Dennis, MBA, CHAE, CHTP

How many times have you received some sort of a reward that the boss thought was a great idea but did nothing for you? Dan is the chief engineer of a full-service hotel. He loves football and he never misses going to the local sports bar with his wife, meeting up with his friends and watching the game. His boss wanted to show his appreciation for something that Dan did and gave him a beautiful, autographed football in a glass case that Dan could display in his office. This is something that the boss really wanted himself, and just knew would please Dan. Dan thanked the boss for the gift, but quickly put it out of sight. Dan was not motivated by the status symbols. In fact, such an expensive gift made him feel uncomfortable. What would have pleased Dan more would have been to have a group of his guys join him and watch the game. The cost of beer and pizza would have been much less than the trophy football and would have been something that Dan valued. The boss spent a lot of time and money to give Dan a reward that he did not value and that did nothing to encourage him to do more on the job.
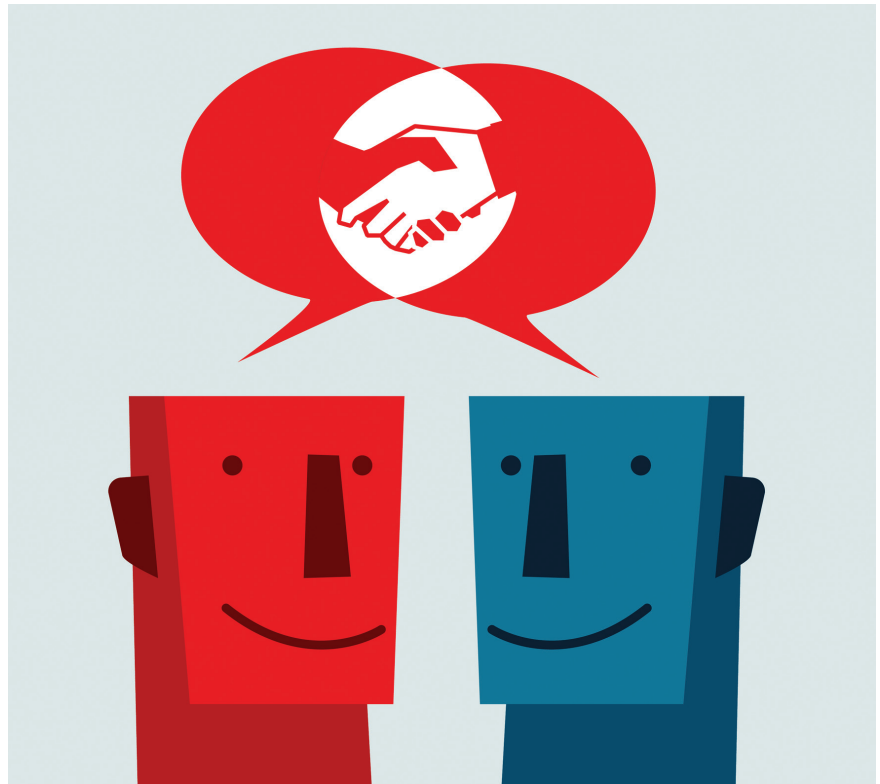
Valerie is the assistant controller and has been the backbone of the accounting department for several years. While going over several payroll reports she discovered an error in how payroll taxes were being reported to the IRS. As she dug into the problem, she realized that this error could result in hundreds of dollars in fines. She brought the error to the attention of the controller who immediately

Beverly Dennis, MBA, CHAE, CHTP is an associate professor of business administration and management at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage, Alaska USA. Dennis is also a speaker at the 2 015 Annual Convention & Tradeshow. She can be reached at beverlydennisak@gmail.com.

notified corporate and they fixed the mistake. Valerie was lauded as a hero and was asked to stand in front of the next board meeting and tell the members of the board all about her discovery. She received a standing ovation at the next employee meeting and got a lot of attention for her diligence. Valerie shortly thereafter continued to prepare the corporate reports, but she stopped looking at anything not in her specific area of responsibility. She kept most of her observations to herself and withdrew from simple social activities like having lunch with the other people in the office. A few months later she gave notice and found another job.

What went wrong with Dan and Valerie? It might have been that they received rewards that they did not value and did not motivate them. Also, the reward made them so uncomfortable that it had the opposite effect.

Motivation and Personality Types

What do we know about motivation? The study of motivation of employees began in earnest in the 20th century, beginning with Fredrich Taylor's theory of scientific management. Taylor was the first one to hold that the people in the organization were as important as the machinery that they worked on *(Hersey, Blanchard, Johnson, 2013)*. What the hundreds of theories have tried to address is what motivates the worker and to discover how management can tap into it.

We often think that money is the prime motivator for performance. To a certain extent, that's true, but is that all there is? Few of us would go through budget season for free and there are those days when you have to recite the amount of your last raise to keep you from jumping ship. However, when the pay is decent and fair, how do we ensure that associates give us their best and want to remain on the job?

In *First Break All the Rules (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999)*, the Gallup Organization surveyed over 80,000 managers across different industries on the topic of employee satisfaction.

> " The key idea here is that people are different and that paying attention to those differences makes the person feel important and acknowledged. That feeling translates directly into employee satisfaction which translates directly into superior customer service, employee retention and a more productive business unit."

They were looking at how the best managers retained and motivated their most valuable employees. The results of the survey yielded these two key ideas: The best managers treat every employee as an individual. They found that when people left a company, it was due to dissatisfaction with their immediate managers, and not about the company *(p. 34)*.

Buckingham and Coffman have an interesting definition of basic needs on the job. They maintain that it is these needs that are the ones that get us into trouble if we, as managers are simply focusing on salary and job security. They state that without satisfying these basic needs first, a manager can never expect the employee to give stellar performance *(p. 33)*. The basic needs are:
- Knowing what is expected of the employee at work,
- Giving them the equipment and support to do their work right
- Answering their basic questions of self-worth and self-esteem by giving praise for good work and caring about their development as a person *(p.33)*.

The last item on this list is where we come in with understanding how to give praise and rewards that transmit that we care about our associates and value them. Maslow *(1998)* said it best in his list of assumptions that underlie the "Enlightened Management Policy:" Assume that everyone prefers to feel important, needed, useful, successful, proud and respected, rather than unimportant, interchangeable, anonymous, wasted, unused, expendable and disrespected *(p.28)*. Assume the preference for personhood, uniqueness as a person, identity as opposed to being anonymous or interchangeable. *(p. 39)*.

The key idea here is that people are different and that paying attention to those differences makes the person feel important and acknowledged. That feeling translates directly into employee satisfaction which translates directly into superior customer service, employee retention and a more productive business unit.

How to Determine the Personality Type of the Associate

The next question is: How do we determine individual differences? Happily, this question has been well researched and several personality inventories have been put forward to aid organizations in determining the types of personalities we find in the workplace. Such theories are: *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strength Deployment Inventory, Firo-B, DISC, Now Discover Your Strengths Inventory*, just to name a few. They are all well-researched and are useful in determining how to improve morale and employee satisfaction.

Rewards and Punishments by Personality Type

Based on three basic personality types — Feeler, Thinker and Doer — a manager can use these guidelines to effectively motivate employees.

Rewards for Feelers	Punishments for Feelers
Personalized gifts	Being in a conflict ridden environment
Knowing that their help made a positive difference	Being told their help actually hurt
A party where all can enjoy their success	Having offers of help rejected
Teddy bears, hugs, flowers	Being given the job of disciplining or firing co-workers
Being put on committees that will see to parties and welcomes	Being made to work alone

Rewards for Thinkers	Punishments for Thinkers
Being given as much time as they would like to finish projects	Being put in a position where they have no privacy
A door on their office	Working where there are short timelines that are inflexible
Electronic gadgets that help them organize	Not being trusted
Complex tasks of analysis or creating order	Working where resources are wasted
Trust their work is without error	Being asked for ball park estimates
Tasks they can do alone	Working in emotionally charged environments
Quiet recognition of a job well done	

Rewards for Do-ers	Punishments for Do-ers
Public recognition of success	Being put in positions of no authority
Assigned parking spaces with their name	Reduction of staff
Increased staff	Having information withheld
Money (as a means of keeping score)	Being made to work only at highly detailed tasks that must be done slowly
Plaques recognizing their leadership	Tasks with unclear outcomes
Increased challenges	Anonymity and loss of status
Increased staff	Demotion

Myers Briggs and the Strength Deployment Inventory are two of the most popular theories, and knowledge of them can give us a window into how rewards can be most motivating. Boiled down to the essentials of individual motivation, we can look at three basic personality types:

- *Feeler* — a "people person," one who desires to help others;
- *Thinker* — "independent and prudent," one who needs to create order; and
- *Do-er* — "just do it," one who wants to get results.

(Scudder & LaCroix, 2013, p. 10).

The Feelers are people who are motivated by a strong desire to help. They want the best for others and they will often say that what they like best about their job is the people. Many people with this personality type gravitate to the hospitality industry as it is all about making people feel at home. Customer service comes naturally to this personality type. They also want to avoid confrontation and hate to appear taking advantage of people *(p. 29).*

"Thinkers" are people who seek logical orderliness and prize self-reliance and independence. You will often find this personality type in accounting and IT jobs as the structure of the job itself fits well with their desire for autonomy and analysis. They are the detail people and asking for a "ball park" estimate will not make them happy. They value privacy and cannot stand chaos or emotionally charged environments *(p. 45).*

The "Do-ers" in the workplace will usually be found in supervisory positions. They are competitive and results oriented. They are definitely the ones who understand the need to break a few eggs to make an omelet. They are goal oriented and alert to any and all opportunities. They have little patience with those whom they perceive as wasting time or resources. Details and social niceties cause frustration for these people *(p. 37).*

As we look at this list, we can see that each type values something different, and what is a reward to one, could be considered a punishment to another. For example, in the story of Dan, we can see that Dan is predominately a Feeler. He likes the social aspect of sharing the football season with his friends. Unlike his boss, he is not motivated by status symbols. This mismatch is the main reason that the expensive gift did not achieve its intended purpose. Similarly, the case of Valerie, the assistant controller, the bright light of attention was the last thing she wanted as she is predominately a Thinker. Quiet, one-on-one praise, not public attention, would have made her feel valued and respected.

Matching the Motivational Reward to the Associate

Let's say that all of this information is of great value and you are ready to use this technique to enhance your team. How do you know who is what type? Short of giving everyone in your organization a personality test, there are indicators of type that can be easily observed.

When you look at the office of a Feeler you will see pictures of pets, loved ones and even other people's kids. They will have candy to share and an extra chair to accommodate visitors. Flowers, knick-knacks with sentimental meanings and other objects will be all around. Feelers will usually wear clothes that are chosen primarily for comfort, often with prints and vibrant colors.

Thinkers, on the other hand will appear more conservative and proper, with neat, tailored clothes in neutral colors. They may have a conventional, non-distracting workspace where everything is in order. The workspace may appear chaotic to the observer, but a thinker knows exactly where everything is and will not be happy with someone rearranging his area. You will also find backups of essential supplies, but these are not to share.

Do-ers are all about status. You will see them in simple functional clothes, neat but not fancy, and with designer labels and in good fabrics. On the wall are plaques and other signs of achievement. They love name plates and impressive office accessories. You will find a picture of their kids, but it will be with a trophy. If they have any memorabilia it will be from winning teams.

When an applicant for employment is interviewed, or just in general conversation, motivational types are often revealed:

- Feelers will often say, "I feel." Their stories may be about others and they will offer more than what was asked. There may be a clear emphasis on how the applicant helped others in the organization.
- Thinkers are more deliberate with business-like speech. They will often say, "I think" and enjoy sharing facts and details. They will conduct the conversation in a logical, orderly way. The examples given will be ones that feature error free work and designing of systems.
- Do-ers get right to the point. Their style is, "Asked and answered." They may try to direct the interview. The stories they share will be those of being the top performer, getting things done and overcoming opposition.

The table on page 20 outlines the types of rewards that motivate people by type. It also shows the kinds of things that each type looks upon as something that causes discomfort and may even feel like a punishment to the individual.

Not a Plug and Play System

If only life were as simple as putting people into one of three boxes and plugging in the appropriate rewards. Unfortunately, people and relationships are more complex. The most evolved manager will one day be baffled by an associate whose personality just can't be figured out. The personality type of the manager may sometimes be in stark contrast to that of her subordinates and such a situation will make it difficult to see what will work for someone else.

No matter how perfectly we assess our associates, we can make mistakes. Such mistakes give us another opportunity to reflect, reexamine and revise the reward that seemed so perfect at the time. The key idea is that we understand that one size does not fit all, and that taking the effort to value the associate as he would like to be valued will be what makes us superior managers.

Maslow said, "Accountants must try to figure out some way to turning into balance sheet terms the intangible personnel values that come from improving the people of the organization" *(1998, p. 67)*. By looking at what our associates value about themselves, we can build teams where each member feels valued.

This is our challenge as supervisory personnel. Most people are a blend of a couple of types and that can create a challenge in itself. However, if we can make a reasonable assessment based on our observations, we can get much closer to finding a reward that will motivate our valuable staff member and create a better team. ■

References

- Buckingham, M. & Coffman, C. (1999). First Break All the Rules. New York: Simon & Schuster

- Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. & Johnson, D. (2013). Management of Organizational Behavior. New York: Pearson

- Maslow, A. (1998). Maslow On Management. New York: Wiley

- Myers Briggs Foundation (2015). MBTI Basics. Retrieved from http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/.

- Scudder, T. & LaCroix, D. (2013). Working with SDI. Carlsbad, CA: Personal Strengths Publishing.