



**THINK  
LIKE A  
BLACK  
BELT**

THE ACTUAL VALUE OF MOTIVATION &  
ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Engagement, Motivation, Innovation and Productivity  
through Black Belt Mindset

**Jim Bouchard**

# The Actual Value of Motivation and Engagement in the Workplace

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*By Jim Bouchard, author of Think Like a Black Belt*

## **“The Power of the Wolf is the Pack, and the Power of the Pack is the Wolf.”**

I thank Rudyard Kipling for this expression; I freely paraphrase this sentiment from “The Jungle Book.”

Employee motivation is on one level a very complex process. Highly effective organizations provide opportunities for each individual in the organization to satisfy his or her personal quest for success and happiness. There’s an inherent conflict: The organization can provide certain resources and opportunities for individual success; the fact remains that ultimately all motivation is internal and the process of creating personal success is the responsibility of each individual and each individual has a unique vision of success and happiness.

What is the role of the company when it comes to employee motivation and what is the role of each individual employee? The focus of my life’s work is on the development of the individual, so I’m going to concentrate on the personal responsibility of the *wolf* in creating his or her own success. However, since we’re *pack* animals by nature, let’s look at the opportunity the organization has in providing resources to cultivate and support individual success. The organization that understands the value of supporting individual success for its members is inevitably more productive, innovative, creative and profitable.

## **The Expense of an Unmotivated and Disengaged Workforce**

Three Hundred-Fifty Billion Dollars a year<sup>1</sup>; I don’t know that these words create a powerful enough picture!

\$350,000,000,000 a year; that’s a lot of zeros! In fact, Three hundred billion dollars buys:

- About 16 million new cars.
- About 1.5 million new homes.
- About 3.5 million private college educations.

Wouldn’t it be nice to have all this back in our economy? Of course the losses incurred from lost & wasted time due to a lack of employee motivation and disengagement are not usually felt directly. These employees are still paid for their time; the drain is on the company and the economic impact is secondary and tertiary. We feel this impact on a global level in the form of higher costs of doing business

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<sup>1</sup> Hrcases; “US CEO Compensation Trends”; <http://hrcases.wordpress.com/category/hr-surveys/>... Accessed 9/1/2008

which eventually translates into higher prices for goods and services. The same unmotivated and disengaged employees who are losing and wasting all this time are those who will eventually feel the economic impact of these losses.

Widely published research from the Gallup Organization indicates that only 29% of the American workforce is actively engaged on the job.<sup>2</sup>

- 54% are “not-engaged” moving through the day like automatons.
- 17% are fully “disengaged,” they’re not productive at all and are likely to be disruptive to other employees.

A study by Salary.com shows an average of 2.09 hours lost & wasted per employee workday. This means the average American employee is wasting nearly a quarter of his or her working life.

## **The Power of the Wolf...**

My expertise is personal motivation and performance, so let’s start with the wolf. We’ll return to organizational responsibilities, or at least opportunities later. For now let’s look at the role and responsibilities of the individual at the workplace.

As an employee you are paid to do a job. It’s the responsibility of your company to provide you with the tools, resources and in some cases the training to do your job, usually in relative comfort and safety. The more you advance in your career, or the higher you enter a particular job sector or management level you are likely more responsible for your own training and education; it may even be a pre-requisite for your position.

You are the only person responsible for your individual success and happiness. The only person responsible for your success and happiness is the same person who brushed his teeth in your bathroom mirror this morning. Your company is not obligated to provide you with the motivation or incentive to improve yourself or even to do your job well. It is very likely that when you were hired you demonstrated adequate self-motivation, discipline and character to be considered for your position.

I’m not justifying organizational complacency in regard to employee motivation, quite the opposite. An enlightened organization realizes that investment in motivation, morale, and emotional support of employees is a high-yield investment. Still, no level of investment in motivation, coaching, morale building or incentives will produce results in an employee who completely lacks self-motivation or a sense of personal responsibility. An effective hiring process should qualify motivated employees and screen out slackers before you put them on the job.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Maynard Brusman; Employee Engagement, Running on 1/3 People Power;  
<http://www.workingresources.com/professionaleffectivenessarticles/article.nhtml?uid=10040...> Accessed 9/1/2008

The first step in building a productive and motivated workforce is to hire self-motivated and responsible people. The next step is to understand what motivates individuals in your organization and provide the resources that give each individual the opportunity to create personal success.

### **The Balance Sheet: Motivated Employees are an Asset**

Want to recover some of that lost and wasted time in your organization? If you need some motivation to do so just multiply the American average of 2.09 lost payroll hours per day by your average rate of pay. Based on the average American salary, saving even 10 minutes per employee workday can save a company \$2,000 or more per year. That's just recovering the direct cost of the lost and wasted time. When you invest in the motivation and engagement of your employees what is the actual return on your investment?

- Lower employee turnover resulting in reduced training and replacement expenses.
- Less sick and lost time.
- Healthier employees often translate into lower health insurance premiums.
- Focused, engaged employees make fewer mistakes, have fewer accidents, maintain equipment and facilities to a higher level.
- Provide higher levels of customer service.
- Engaged and motivated employees are:
  - More productive.
  - More creative and responsive.
  - More loyal.
  - More cooperative with other employees, create more productive teams.
  - Better candidates for advancement within the organization.

### ***Motivated and engaged employees attract other motivated and engaged employees!***

In your organization, what is the true monetary value of keeping a motivated and engaged employee for a longer period of time? What is the value of increased customer loyalty and familiarity created by a motivated employee? What is the value of having employees who enjoy and appreciate team members and work together to further your company mission?

### **Understanding Employee Motivation: A New(?) Paradigm**

Remember, the ***Power of the Pack is the Wolf***. How do you motivate your wolves?

My experience with motivation is a front-line perspective. I transformed myself from a disgruntled employee into a *gruntled* employer. When I decided to change my life I began what would become a 20 plus career as a professional martial artist and instructor. I've taught thousands of students to recognize and apply their true potential through martial arts. I wrote **Think Like a Black Belt** and **Dynamic Components of Personal POWER** to translate these principles for success in personal and professional

life. I teach people how to **Think Like a Black Belt** so they can develop **Black Belt Mindset** for personal and professional excellence; I teach the process of continual self-improvement and the power of accepting personal responsibility for success & happiness.

*Harvard Business Review* recently published a tremendous article on employee motivation written by Nitin Nohria, Boris Groysberg and Linda-Eling Lee. Nohria is also co-author with Paul R. Lawrence of **Driven: How Human Nature Shapes our Choices**.

Nohria, Groysberg and Lee are the scholars; I'm a fighter. Let's see if we're on the same page when it comes to exactly what motivates the *wolf*!

According to the scholars there are "Four Basic Drives that Underlie Motivation."<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Four Drives:**

- The drive to acquire.
- The drive to bond.
- The drive to comprehend.
- The drive to defend.

So far so good! You can find these same ideas in Sun Tzu's **The Art of War**. Any martial artist or CEO should be comfortable working within this paradigm.

In a way, these are all drives to acquire. To consider yourself successful you need to have "enough." Of course enough is relative to your own unique requirements and ambitions. You need to have enough in three key life areas:

- **Material**
- **Emotional**
- **Spiritual**

I call this **The Success Triangle**. Our scholars' four drives certainly validate my theory of success. As human beings we want to acquire enough to satisfy our needs and desires materially, emotionally and spiritually. The drive to bond certainly speaks to our need to acquire meaningful emotional connections at work, home and in our community. The drive to comprehend speaks to our greater spiritual need to acquire some level of connection with our purpose and place in the universe. Emotionally and spiritually we want to acquire knowledge and experience that allows us to make a meaningful contribution at home, at work and in the world around us. The drive to defend speaks to our need to acquire a certain measure of safety and security. "The drive to defend tells us a lot about people's resistance to change"<sup>4</sup> according to our scholars; I agree.

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<sup>3</sup> Nitin Nohria, Boris Groysberg, Linda-Eling Lee; "Employee Motivation: A Powerful New Model"; *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2008; pages 80-81

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, at 81

***“Because the four drives are hardwired into our brains, the degree to which they are satisfied directly affects our emotions and, by extension, our behavior.”<sup>5</sup>***

These drives are integral to our brain physiology because these drives are necessary for survival. We need to acquire at the very least adequate food and shelter. We learned early in our development as Homo sapiens that bonding gave us a distinct advantage over bigger, stronger and badder animals armed with sharper teeth and claws. Our drive to comprehend gave us the ability to learn, adapt, survive, and eventually to migrate and thrive in conditions and environments far from our warm and lush African origins. Our drive to defend is of course essential to any creature’s existence and is the key to protecting our hard won resources.

As our relative drives for basic necessities are more easily satisfied, our drive to comprehend the world around us and our place in it become more important. Out of necessity our ancestors focused most of their energy on hunting or gathering enough to eat and finding shelter from whatever wanted to eat them. Most American workers can satisfy the basic drives to acquire and defend the basic material resources of food and shelter; we’re left with an increased need to satisfy our drive for emotional and spiritual resources. We’re now entering an age where it’s more important than ever for us to feel a sense of purpose and belonging. We have plenty of time to think about what we want to do with, well, our time. Since we’ll spend nearly a third of our lives at work, what we do on the job to satisfy those needs is more important than ever before.

If you can’t satisfy these drives, or the relative satisfaction of material, emotional and spiritual acquisition you’re likely to view the world from the perspective of scarcity and negativity.

Scarcity and negativity are not conducive to productivity, performance, creativity or teamwork. Scarcity and negativity induce proprietary behaviors, caution, fear and complacency. If the perceived cause of this scarcity and negativity is the workplace, the inevitable result is disengagement.

If, on the other hand, the workplace provides you with opportunities to express yourself creatively, to find purpose in how you’re spending a third or more of your life, and allows you to develop meaningful connections with others; your job becomes a valuable part of your identity and your personal satisfaction. The workplace that helps you satisfy these drives becomes a valuable resource for your personal development, success and happiness.

## **The Value of Power**

***Power is your ability or capacity to act or perform effectively.***

Each of us has the innate desire for power. You want to feel as if you’re effective, that your actions are meaningful and likely to produce a desired result. Power is necessary to satisfy the four drives. Motivation is a product of power or one’s feelings of effectiveness. Confidence in your ability or capacity to perform or act effectively results in greater personal motivation. When you lack a feeling of power, if

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, at 80

you feel ineffective, you're more likely to feel disengaged. Without power you feel as if your work is futile and meaningless. You can't imagine your work contributing to your vision of personal success and happiness. Your life at work fails to have any significant meaning.

***Can the organization provide the resources an individual needs to satisfy the four drives, to have a reasonable chance of acquiring material, emotional and spiritual satisfaction? Can the organization provide what the individual needs to create and realize a personal vision of success & happiness?***

## **The Power of the Pack:**

The most effective organization commits to providing the resources each member needs to have a chance at personal success. An organization is made up, above all else, of people. When the organization dedicates itself to the success of the individual, each individual member is more likely to contribute to the success of the organization as a whole.

What can you do to motivate and engage each individual in your organization?

The first and probably most important step is to make sure motivation is a top-down process. All effective motivation is a product of effective leadership and the most effective leaders lead by example. The leader models a commitment to continual self-motivation and personal development seldom has to demand compliance to his or her standards; people will be more inspired to follow. An alleged leader who thinks motivation is an external process to be installed or compelled will soon find that people are naturally resistant to dictatorship.

You can compel people to action by fear, deprivation and control but unless you can also keep them in the workplace with a fence, you're setting your organization up for disaster. When you model personal motivation and share your motivation and enthusiasm openly people are much more likely to follow. A strong company culture starts at the top.

The next step is to find out what motivates each individual on your team personally. Train your managers to do the same. Install a culture of open communication and meaningful delegation throughout your organization. Place competent people in strong teams, give them the resources they need and let them work.

General George S. Patton once said:

***"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."***<sup>6</sup>

At the same time you've got to assure fair and equitable treatment in compensation, distribution of workload and recognition. People respond to fair treatment and become resistant or complacent when they perceive injustice or unfairness.

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Axelrod, Patton on Leadership (Paramus, N.J.: Prentiss Hall Press, 1999), 165.

There are many systems and techniques available to install and monitor equitable compensation, work distribution and recognition on an organizational level. My focus is on the individual. Earning a Black Belt is one of the most personally motivating experiences any person can have. Nobody can earn the Black Belt for you. You will have a lot of help along the way in the person of teachers, fellow students and those who support your efforts. Ultimately, you're the one who steps onto the floor and earns the belt.

The same is true for success in personal and professional life. Carter McNamara, MBA & PhD. of Authenticity Consulting puts it this way:

***"You can't motivate people any more than you can empower them. Employees have to motivate themselves. However, you can set up an environment where they best motivate and empower themselves."***

Success is a product of Personal Power; to be successful, you must be effective. Effectiveness increases value and value is ultimately what is rewarded by increased compensation, responsibility and recognition. My martial arts experience taught me that power is generated through the components of ***motivation*** and ***discipline*** applied over ***time***. Motivation and discipline must be internalized. These are the commodities that make one more effective or ***powerful*** and therefore more valuable. Motivation and discipline must be applied over as much time as it takes to increase one's effectiveness and therefore value.

When you look at it from this perspective you're really developing something in excess of skill; you're really developing mastery. Mastery is valued more highly than skill because mastery is required for effective leadership at the highest levels. Mastery attracts *respect*.

How does this stack up to the scientific findings of our scholars? Remember that the more the organization can satisfy the four drives that underlie motivation the more motivated and engaged the workforce is likely to be. I'll add that as employees share greater responsibility in this process, and the more they see equitable management of this process they'll respond with a greater level of loyalty, commitment and ultimately productivity.

Nohria, Groyserg and Lee recommend a logical and effective set of actions:

First, the drive to acquire can be addressed through a reward system. They recommend that you "sharply differentiate" between performance levels and "tie rewards clearly to performance."

The drive to bond is satisfied by creating a positive organization culture that encourages "mutual reliance and friendship" and encourages productive teamwork.

They link the drive to comprehend with job design. This satisfies an employee's desire for meaningful work that contributes to organization success. I'll add here that providing training opportunities for personal and professional development and actively soliciting employee input in processes increases feelings of being a meaningful part of the organization. We wonder about our place in the greater scheme; it's important to provide opportunities for employees to have a place in the greater scheme!

Finally, the drive to defend is satisfied by “performance-management and resource-allocation processes.” People need to know they’re being treated fairly and they need to know they can trust their superiors and the organization. You cannot foster feelings of security within a culture of distrust or incompetence. The drive to defend really speaks to personal security and that feeling is fostered by fair treatment and open communication.

The real secret according to this remarkable team of researchers is to satisfy all four drives with relative balance. Concentrating on one area at the expense of another is not effective. For example, a high-compensation package means nothing when employees perceive unfairness in how compensation is distributed or see others rewarded without regard to performance or meaningful contribution.

The source of human energy and power is represented by the three components of the **Energy Triangle**: *body, mind and spirit*. Each of the four drives corresponds to one or more of these three fundamental sources of human energy.

The drive to acquire is a physical and emotional need that relates to body and mind. We are driven to have *enough* to satisfy our basic human needs. The drive to bond is an emotional and spiritual drive that extends from our mind and spiritual need for connection. Likewise we are driven by mind and spirit to understand the world around us and our place in it: the drive to comprehend. The drive to defend rises from all three and is expressed in body, mind and spirit. Spirit specifically speaks to courage; our willingness to act in the face of danger or risk.

What is more essential to the performance of a highly effective organization than employees who are willing to extend themselves beyond current limits of performance and creativity? This requires courage, a sense of personal excellence and power. It requires **Black Belt Mindset**!

The organization can provide resources, support and training to provide the opportunity for each individual to develop in body, mind and spirit and cultivate power through motivation and discipline over time. The organization can provide the structure and resources to afford each individual to apply power most effectively through the components of the **Power Triangle**: *balance, focus and timing*.

Developing a culture of **Black Belt Mindset** for personal and organizational performance is not a matter of installing a system; **Black Belt Mindset** can increase performance in any positive culture and even some negative cultures. It’s a matter of developing awareness of the process of developing power and ultimately developing a strong culture of leadership, purpose and power at all levels of an organization.

The most effective organization is the one that provides the greatest opportunity to develop as effective individuals. Powerful individuals create powerful and productive organizations. An organization that provides equitable opportunity for each individual to create a personal vision of success and happiness through one’s work is most likely to develop and sustain a dedicated and productive workforce.

## How to Get People to Motivate Themselves

The goal of any business is sustainable profitability. We can cite studies, introduce systems and discuss management theories as they relate to motivation. In the end to be truthful I still need to reiterate the conclusions of the scholars I've quoted and my personal experience as a teacher and trainer:

***"To be effective all motivation must be internalized; ultimately motivation is the responsibility of the individual."***

Some more Harvard scholars, David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind and Michael Irwin Meltzer put it this way:

***"Most companies have it all wrong. They don't have to motivate their employees. They have to stop de-motivating them."***

That's a fact! The key to employee motivation is not a patronizing attempt to motivate others; it's a well considered effort to understand the personal motivations of each member of your organization and to provide the resources and opportunities for self-motivated people to excel.

I'll take it one step further and say that it's nearly impossible to motivate anyone who is not self-motivated. Get rid of unmotivated or disengaged workers. Better, don't hire them to begin with. Some will get through; be prepared to cut your losses.

So what's the best way to help self-motivated people motivate themselves? I'm going to take the liberty of condensing my study of current motivational theories, the wisdom of the ancient martial arts sages and I'll sprinkle in a healthy dose of my 20 plus years of experience as a teacher and alleged motivator:

- **Be an *inspiration* to others.** While it's nearly impossible to motivate another person, we all find other people motivational and inspirational. If you want to be motivational, be motivated and lead by example.
- **Cultivate your own Power:** people are attracted to power, not weakness. People follow powerful leaders and run from weak ones.
- **Provide the training, education and resources that people need to succeed.** Most of all provide opportunity based on personal merit.
- **Provide incentive to fail safely.** This means recognize the effort when someone is courageous enough to push the envelope. This does not mean to reward foolish mistakes, incompetence or carelessness. Reward those brave enough to reach beyond conventional limitations and you'll find someone that will lead your organization to the next great opportunity.

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<sup>7</sup> David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind, Michael Irwin Meltzer; "Stop Demotivating Your Employee!"; Harvard Management Update, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 2006. From <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/5289.html>... accessed 9/1/2008.

- **Recognize excellence and provide support for those making a sincere effort.** At the same time, don't coddle or show special preference to those who don't deserve it or refuse to accept responsibility for personal success & performance.
- **Criticize fairly and praise sincerely.** Encourage rather than disparage, even in moments of intensity. Criticize the action, not the character of a person. Offer correction in the form of a clear statement of the issue, followed by a question or correction that guides one to a solution.
- **Share your knowledge, wisdom, and experience with others.** Create your personal and organizational vision of success and share that vision with others. Provide the resources necessary to realize that success and provide the opportunity for individuals to realize personal success in synergy with organization goals.
- **Teach every member of your organization to Think Like a Black Belt!** Black Belt Mindset is the key to individual and organizational excellence.

The closer your personal and organizational goals align with those of the individual members the more motivated your people will be. Ultimately this is the process of generating power and applying that power to achieve success.

## The Most Effective Motivational Process

The most effective motivational process, the way to create a culture that satisfies the basic human drives, needs and desires is: **TEACHING**.

In business you can call it coaching, mentoring and training but the process is fundamentally teaching. Teaching is the most elemental human interaction. The bond between student and teacher is one of the strongest human connections. In martial arts this bond is legendary! The *Sensei* guides the student through the constant process of self-perfection. The student naturally evolves into a teacher who again shares this process with the next generation.

Effective teaching, coaching and mentoring is dependent on sincere, open and consistent communication. Teaching is the process of delivering the intellectual and emotional resources necessary for any individual to perform or act effectively: to become powerful.

**Be a business Sensei!** A sincere teacher is a powerful resource. A culture of effective teaching, mentoring and coaching satisfies all the drives one needs to create personal motivation. This culture expands the potential of the organization exponentially.

Effective teaching and mentoring can and should be installed at all levels of an organization. Everyone in the organization should be a *Sensei* and can actively engage in the process of mentoring others. The role of teacher and mentor gives one the feeling that he or she has value to others and is making a meaningful contribution to the organization.

Not everyone will be a great teacher, but nearly everyone can teach something. A meaningful discussion of the process of teaching goes beyond the scope of this article. For now it's enough to state that all effective leaders are effective teachers.

Jeffrey Gitomer shares the wisdom of John Patterson, President of National Cash Register and arguably the father of modern motivational and sales training:<sup>8</sup>

***“Business is nothing but teaching.”***

I'd make the argument that life is nothing but teaching. If you want others to be motivated, teach them how to motivate themselves. If you want others to find motivation through your actions, teach.

I've devoted most of my adult life to teaching. I've enjoyed the rewards of having others consider me a valuable resource in their lives. I've seen them embrace the process of self-motivation and self-perfection I've tried to model. As I've given more value to others, they've rewarded me materially, emotionally and spiritually. The highest honor in my life is repeated every day when a student addresses me as *Sensei*.

The organization that dedicates itself to teaching becomes a tremendously valuable resource in the lives of all its members. Your teaching should include the skills and training necessary for effective job performance. Since your employees are likely to spend a third or more of their adult lives on the job, extending opportunities for training in personal development and personal success tremendously increases the value of the organization in the lives of your employees. When the leadership of the organization is personally involved in the teaching process by coaching and mentoring as well as sponsorship, the leaders become a valuable resource in the lives of employees.

The two most important qualities of leadership are: GRATITUDE and GENEROSITY. When you teach you are constantly expressing gratitude for the efforts and achievements of your students; because we're talking about business let's call them employees. You are continually engaged in the process of sharing your knowledge, wisdom, experience and power.

***What could be more motivating?***



**THINK**  
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Change the way you think  
about life, business & success  
forever! From now on...

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Gitomer, Little Platinum Book of Cha-Ching (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2007), page 75.