

What motivates us to learn?



Motivation, the great purveyor of achievement and innovation, is what determines if and how we get from point A to point B. Motivation can be as simplistic as getting us out of bed in the morning to as complex as solving the great mysteries of the universe. Yet in each and every instance, there is some factor keeping us motivated to move forward. Otherwise, we will risk slipping into physical and mental atrophy.

Commenting on motivation, the late, great American humorist and author Mark Twain once said: “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” While Twain’s motivation for writing was simple and direct, there is a ring of credence in relation to what motivates people to seek out opportunities for training and advancement.

The importance of developing awareness for training strategies must take into account the learning styles of a multi-generational and aging workforce. This in addition holds true to the motivational factors of why workers may or may not seek out training opportunities.

The Impact of Age



In a 2011 study conducted at Portland State University and the University of Trento (Italy), researchers found evidence that age was a moderator in the relationship of a proactive motivation for career development and training intentions. With many organizational training programs being offered, employees have greater opportunities for learning and development. These opportunities, however, increase individual responsibility for getting the training that will enhance his or her career.

An individual who has a propensity for being proactive will take actions such as seeking out training opportunities to influence his or her environments with salary, promotions and career satisfaction as their prime motivators.

Career Objectives



Thinking back to my younger days, I concur with the factors of salary, promotion and career satisfaction as the proactive motivation influencing my career objectives. However, this may not be as true today as it was 20 years ago. The motivational aspect for me now versus 20 years ago differs due to changes across my life span in terms of certain individual needs, rewards and career situations.

This is because, in general, younger individuals are more focused on their career growth orientations, while older individuals are more focused on career maintenance. In other words, a younger worker's training motivations are more focused on optimizing performance, while an older worker's is more or less a factor of minimizing losses.

Generational Differences



In terms of proactive motivation for training, this does not mean that older workers are less proactive than younger workers. Rather, proactive motivation is manifested differently. For example, in the many classes and training seminars that I have conducted, I can attest to distinct generational differences in the motivation of those who attend the class.

As an obligatory component of each class or seminar that I conduct, I will always start the session off with the opportunity for each person to introduce themselves and, through a series of questions, provide some insight as to what motivated them to be there. Younger attendees will always refer to their desire for moving up the corporate ladder or making themselves more marketable (growth), while older attendees will, somewhere in the exchange, make mention of how many years they have been with their organization and how many years they have left before retirement (maintenance).

For organizations, this dichotomy in proactive motivation between younger and older workers does not necessarily translate into a conundrum of which type of training strategy the organization should choose. Choose a career growth strategy to suffice opportunistic younger workers who may take what they have learned and move on to another company, or a career maintenance strategy to placate the older more loyal workers who are there to ride out the last few years before retirement?

The answer to this puzzle may not be in looking at this problem as a dichotomous issue, but as an opportunity to explore the synergies of proactive motivations for both younger and older workers.

Synergies



These synergies are possible by tapping into regenerative learning to proactively motivate older workers. Using a regenerative approach, older workers serve in a teaching, mentoring or coaching capacity to address the proactive motivations of both

younger and older workers.

Policies, processes and organizational citizenship are a few of the synergistic opportunities that will suffice in the career development motivation for younger workers and the career maintenance motivation for older workers.

What better way to continue the cycle of learning and advancement than to utilize and redeploy an organization's best and most experienced resources?

In addition, an older worker's sense of self-worth to the organization is likewise reenergized. Instead of counting down the months, weeks and days to the end of a career, older workers can find value in the knowledge transfer of experience and skills to the next generation of the organization.

This cycle of organizational learning is in many ways symbiotic to the cycle of life where the elders pass along what they have learned to the next generation. I cannot think of a better way to motivate younger and older workers than to allow the synergies of regenerative learning to be a part of an organization's training and development strategy.

Opportunities for continuing the learning life cycle of an organization are within the organization itself. Over time, as workers transition in their careers from motivations of career advancement to motivations of career maintenance, regenerating the life cycle of learning from one generation to the next is the sustenance that keeps organizations vibrant and productive.