Motivation. It’s a word that has taken on new meaning and stronger importance as companies strive to get the best out of people in a game where the rules have changed. Prior to 2008, when the financial crisis set in, the main motivation was financial rewards or promotions. Now there are more regulations, more options for emerging talent, and less cash to go around. That’s the bad news. The good news is that companies are more committed than ever to find ways to motivate their people.

No matter what the industry, no matter what the role, people struggle with motivating themselves and motivating others. It’s consistently a top area of concern for businesses. Since the Great Recession, businesses have been struggling to get people to do more with less. They all want a silver bullet to motivate people. Well, as I’m sure you already know, there is no one fix for all. However, that’s not necessarily bad news.

Think about when someone takes the time to remember your name and get to know you as an individual. In my experience, there is a strong correlation between learning and remembering someone’s name and the probability of engaging them. This mundane habit is often a catalyst for learning more about what a person cares about or prioritizes. As with most of my advice, it’s pretty simple. Get to know people and what they care about and leverage that. Too often leaders make the mistake of focusing on their own greatest skill or motivator. For example, if a leader is results and numbers driven, they will try and motivate using results and numbers. Sounds like a good strategy, right? Wrong. It’s terrible. People don’t want to be lead according to what motivates you; they want to be lead according to what motivates them.

How do we figure this out? First we need to know what we are looking for, and then we need to adapt to capitalize on it.

**Simple Success Strategy: Pay People with Their Motivational Currency**

If you don’t know where individuals want to go, how can you point them in the correct direction? The goal is to leverage what motivates people so they are engaged and want to take action. Ask yourself, have you ever had someone do something you needed done without asking for it? That’s called initiative or discretionary effort. People want to do things, and they want to do them well. As a leader you just need to tap into their Motivational Currency.

How do we know what motivates people and, just as important, what do we do once we know? Harvard professor David McClelland’s (1961) research on motivation identifies three social motives: Achievement, Affiliation, and Power. The theory is that these three motives move people toward behavior. Modifying his theoretical framework and combining it with over a decade of my own experiences working with companies, I developed the Motivational Currency Calculator (MCC) (Calculating Your Motivational Currency Blog, Fazio, 2015). This resource is a direct, simple approach to identifying and leveraging individuals’ motivational currency.
Motivational Currency Calculator: The Core Four

In my view, many things drive people. However, for the most part, they fall into four basic areas: Performance, People, Power, and Purpose. The most skilled leaders recognize that motivations come in a variety of currencies, and learning the process of converting those currencies is the key to moving people to action. Drawing from theoretical research that helps us understand how people are motivated, this MCC gives you an accessible and straightforward way to leverage this knowledge into your business domain.

As much as we wish it were as simple as a one size fits all, when it comes to motivation and much of psychology, people are unique, and we take action based on our personalities, previous experiences, and current situation. What this means is that although most people will have a primary motivator, it is often the case that people have multiple motivators. Someone can be highly motivated by more than one driver at a time. Someone could be just as driven by Performance as they are by People. The stronger your motivators are in one area, the easier it is for you to make decisions and the more challenging it is to manage your impulses.

Following are descriptions of the four motivators, presented in an intuitive and straightforward way. The goals are to be able to: a) identify what your primary motivators are, b) read what the motivators are for others, and c) lead with intention so you can motivate others quickly and effectively.

**Performance.** The Performance motivator is about results. Individuals who are driven by performance want to get things done. They pride themselves on not just completing tasks, but excelling. A person with a drive for performance thrives on meeting challenges and exceeding standards. They are often fast paced, direct, and focused on outcomes. Performance-driven people are not afraid to challenge the status quo and expect others to have as much drive as they do.

A potential setback for individuals who are performance-driven is overlooking the impact getting tasks completed has on other people. If someone is extremely motivated by performance, they have a tendency to focus on the outcome and not pay a lot of attention to the process. They can be perceived as overly direct or controlling.

In groups the Performance-driven person is often the person who takes the lead and drives things to resolution. They can come across as controlling or demanding. They want to drive to resolution and complete a task or set a new standard.

**People.** The People motivator is about relationships. Individuals who are driven by the People motivator are most concerned about getting along, teamwork, and collaboration. They are focused on how things impact others. They tend to have strong social radar and can read people well.

A potential setback for individuals who are People-driven is they can lose sight of an objective because they are overly concerned on how others feel. If someone is overly
People focused they can get caught up in the process and not pay attention to the result. They can be perceived as too feelings oriented or indirect.

In groups, the People-driven person is often the one who asks a lot of questions, is inclusive, and focuses on getting everyone’s opinion. A common descriptor of someone who is People driven is “nice” or “team-oriented.”

**Power.** The Power motivator is about influence. People who are motivated by Power put a premium on being persuasive and offering their point of view. They often are effective at providing advice and communicating the importance of brand and reputation.

A potential setback for individuals who are Power-driven is they get caught up in status and reputation. They have a need to feel important and receive recognition. They can come across as “one uppers” meaning people who tend to build on what other people say and highlight their experience. They can be perceived as insecure if they have not reached the academic or professional status of those around them.

In groups, the Power-driven person is often the person who gives their point of view early and often. Power-driven people have a desire to be influential so they often tell stories and talk about the big picture or how things “will be.” They often are someone who gives unsolicited advice. They have a tendency to hint or overtly communicate who they know and how important they are.

**Purpose.** The Purpose motivator is about helping others and contributing to something outside of themselves. They often crave having purpose and meaning in their work. Many Purpose-driven people are motivated by developing others or volunteering and community involvement. They excel at getting people to focus on the greater good and can be tremendous enterprise contributors. They can get people to think across business silos and think about what is best for the entire group or business rather than individuals or teams.

A potential setback for individuals who are Purpose-driven is they can become disengaged if there is not meaning or a focus on the greater good in their work. They have a need to see the bigger picture and are passionate about being selfless. They often focus on learning about businesses, cultures, or communities outside of their own. They often are eager to find resources that will help them help others.

In groups a Purpose-driven person tends to try and find ways to connect what they are doing to a bigger picture. They will often question the purpose of an initiative. They can be perceived as overly idealistic or not focused on identified results. A common stereotype, right or wrong, of Millennials is that they are purpose driven.
Awareness and action are cornerstones of progress and success. If you want a more in-depth understanding of your Motivational Currency profile and how you can be more effective at motivating others, you can take the MCC at www.OnPointAdvising.com.

While motivation can seem abstract and complicated, there are some simple strategies that yield results. The mistake I see many managers making is treating motivation as something that they need to do to employees, rather than something that leaders do with employees. There is no one size fits all silver bullet. However, there are strategies that work. It starts with a motivation mindset and ends with being intentional about knowing what makes you and others tick so you spend your time wisely and help others do the same.

When people talk about motivation they usually talk about it from the perspective of how do I motivate others. I have been extremely fortunate over the past several years to learn from Howard Ross, who is a partner at LLR Partners, a private equity firm in Philadelphia. Quite simply put, Howard is as helpful as he is brilliant. I asked him the question, "What is the most helpful yet simple strategy he could offer people?" He said stay focused on your core business and your business needs. He went on to explain that too often people let their personal needs get in the way their business needs. His example was that he often sees CEOs and entrepreneurs making the mistake of straying of what they do best or buying a huge building because of ego or trying to prove something. He added that if you can’t manage yourself, turn over the business to someone who can grow it effectively and exercise your dreams or needs in another context.

Howard’s simple strategy magnifies the importance of knowing what your own motivational currency is. If you are someone who is extremely high in Power and low in all the other areas, there is a chance that you could lose focus on what you need to do follow through on your core business needs. The point is to be able to recognize your tendencies so you don’t make poor decisions solely based on your personal needs.