

Chapter 4

You cannot motivate anyone else.

Attempting to do so only annoys them, frustrates you, and wastes your time.

There is no one on this planet who has not, at some point in their life, wanted someone else to do something—or even many things. You and I want the other person to do something, we see why it is important that they do it, or at least, why it would really be helpful if they did it, and we encourage them to do it. Yet, often, they don't budge. Not a muscle moves. We tell them again all the reasons why they ought to take action...nothing. We beg them and they just blink at us. We complain and kvetch and cajole and threaten and shout and...they do squat. They just don't seem to care at all, despite what they might say in agreement with us about what they could do, should do, might do, etc. It seems like all the desire to do is on our side and all the unwillingness to do is on theirs. It is so frustrating! What is the name of this agonizing and fruitless process? It is called "motivating others."

Motivating others usually involves our making one or more of the following statements to the "motivatee":

- *Would you just get off your butt and do this?*
- *If you spent as much time taking care of it as you have avoiding it, you would already have it done!*
- *How many times do I have to ask you to do this?*
- *If you don't do it now, I'll...*

Sometimes we might even see a little activity in response to these statements but the action only lasts a short time and then it's back to a whole lot of nothing, right? So we ratchet up our comments, complaints, and threats until we see just a little slow movement starting again. Over time, however, this painful cycle of our cajoling and the other person's response by small movements forward stops working altogether. We get to a place where our increased volume, threats, begging, and tears just no longer produce any action at all on the part of the other person. By that time we have also gotten to critical mass in terms of anger, resentment, and frustration. The sad truth is the other person feels pretty much the same towards us. Everyone is angry, relationships are damaged, and there is now no movement at all. Welcome to the wonderful world of "motivating others!"

Why is trying to motivate someone else so painful and difficult? Why does it just not seem to work no matter how often you have tried it? Because the hard truth is that you CANNOT motivate someone else. You have really tried in the past, though, haven't you? You have been a real trooper! Have you had much success, though? I doubt it. Why not? Because (and really listen to this carefully because it is the fourth law of life) "*you cannot motivate anyone else.*" Nearly all your repeated attempts to get someone motivated to do anything have resulted in frustration for both of you and have wasted

your time, effort, and emotional energy. So stop it! Give it up! Let it go! Motivating others is impossible and attempting to do so is a time and life waster.

I know this is probably totally opposite of what you have always believed and it may be a tough truth to swallow. In fact, you may have cherished the fantasy that you could motivate someone else but that belief has always been what it always will be...a fantasy. The hard reality is that you have never been able to motivate the other person and any of their small movements forward in response to your attempts to push them or motivate them have usually been just their way to get you to shut up and get off their backs. What is really happening is that your attempts to motivate are punishing to them and they will take a little action, and only just enough action, to get you to stop the punishment. Once you shut up, they stop. Why? They stop because this cycle is punishment avoidance not motivation. The fact is, you haven't ever truly motivated them in the past, despite your fantasy that you have the power to do so, and you won't ever in the future. What you thought was your power to motivate was actually just their temporary response, in the form of some action *you* seemed to want at the time, to get you to leave them alone. No motivation was ever really given and none was ever really received because, again, *you cannot motivate anyone else*. It is a law of life. You can break your head and heart against this law if you want. You can complain that it is not fair and that it shouldn't be this way but the law will not change. It is the way reality is and until you accept it and change *your* behavior and approach with others to line up with it, you will cause yourself and those around you much needless pain, frustration, and disappointment.

All of this does not just apply to your life or personal relationships, by the way. Accepting the law that we cannot motivate someone else is not just a hard thing for people in private relationships to do. In fact three of the biggest arenas in which people desperately need to learn and accept this law of the inability to motivate others is: (1) business; (2) healthcare, and; (3) religion/spirituality. For centuries (in healthcare's case it has been mostly the past 50 years) people in each of these arenas have attempted to motivate others to do things so that their actions would improve: (1) productivity/profit; (2) personal health outcomes, and; (3) faith-based behaviors. Almost always, in these three arenas, one or more "leaders" of some type have tried to motivate one or more "followers" of some type to do more or less of something the "leaders" determined would make a positive impact. The problem has always been (because the law that you cannot motivate anyone else has always been operative) that the "followers" just don't follow through. They physically hear what the "leaders" say, with or without actually listening or attending to it, and then go back to what they were doing before they got their "motivation" message. Once the message has been delivered, the "leaders" think they have made a big impact and go off congratulating themselves and looking forward to the behavioral changes in their "followers" that will push things over the top. The "followers" go back to their lives and concerns as they were before the interaction and do what they have always done. Nothing much has changed and, likely, won't. When the "leaders" don't see the results they wanted they wind up being disappointed and so call the "followers" back in for another dose of "motivation." The dosages and disappointments continue until somebody fires

somebody else or one or both just quit trying altogether. Much hurt and much disappointment is produced because both sides could not or did not understand and accept the fact that motivating others is a total waste of time and it is a relationship killer. You may have been on both sides of this equation in your own business world as a supervisor or employee, in managing health as a healthcare provider or a patient, and in the realm of spirituality as one who is a “leader” at some level (very much including parenthood) and as one who is a member of a church or family being “led” by someone else. No matter where it happens, trying to motivate someone else to do something just doesn’t work but, in these three big arenas as in our own personal lives, we keep trying anyway. I know because I’ve tried in each of these arenas and in my personal life and relationships.

In terms of business, I have consulted in some capacity with over 60 non- and for-profit businesses in industries ranging from aerospace to heavy manufacturing. During that work, I have seen many, many business leaders trying hard to motivate their people and experiencing daily frustrations that come from their lack of success in doing so. Business leaders know how important a motivated workforce is and because they struggle in their failed attempts to motivate their people, they bring in motivational speakers or corporate trainers. They hope the speakers will motivate their people and the trainers will teach the managers how to motivate their direct reports more successfully. Sadly, not much comes of it all. The motivational speakers get everyone whooped up and excited and this lasts maybe 24 hours after which people return to their normal mode of operation with the added disappointment that actual reality in the organizational cubicles just isn’t as the speaker had suggested it might be or could be. The corporate trainer (I have done my fair share of corporate training, by the way) teaches, in a worse case scenario, that motivational models and techniques will work if applied as taught and, in the best case scenario, suggests that motivating others is really about putting in place and aligning lots of organizational factors that will tap each person’s internal motivators. Unfortunately the models/techniques don’t work in practice as described and many organizations just don’t want to do all the work to tap the motivations of their people. So, again, things return to a stale normalcy. Business leaders then often try another consultant or another trainer/speaker and do this year after year in the vain attempt to learn what they can never learn: how to motivate others.

I’ve seen the same frustrations in healthcare in my consulting work with hospitals, healthcare organizations and physician groups. I’ve also experienced it myself as a clinical psychologist, a provider of mental healthcare services. Healthcare providers of all types have also struggled in their attempts to motivate others. In their case, the “others” are usually their patients who need to make the lifestyle changes needed to improve their health (e.g. increased exercise, improved diet, reduction in smoking, alcohol consumption, etc.). Why do the providers try? According to the *National Institutes of Health*, about half of all health problems are caused by behavior, such as smoking; excess drinking, and poor diet. Specifically about half of the estimated \$39 billion in healthcare spending in 1998 was spent on disorders related to obesity/excess body weight. That’s a lot of cash spent on problems that could be eliminated by diet and exercise. Health economists at the University of California reported that the total

cost of caring for people with health problems caused by cigarette smoking--counting all sources of medical payments--is about \$72.7 billion per year. If people in the United States would manage their diet, do some regular exercise, and stop smoking, we could save approximately \$112,000,000,000 (\$112 billion) a year in healthcare costs—not to mention lives.

Healthcare providers also try to motivate patients to take the medications for the health problems that they presented with at the clinic or hospital. Unfortunately people don't comply with the prescribed medication regimen and an estimated 125,000 people with treatable ailments die each year simply because they do not take prescribed medications properly or they skip them altogether. *Food and Drug Administration* statistics show that:

- 55% of tuberculosis patients, 48% of diabetics, 46% of asthmatics, and 42% of glaucoma patients use their medicines correctly—meaning half or more of each didn't!
- 14 to 21% of patients never even fill their original prescriptions
- 10% of adolescent pregnancies result from non-compliance with birth control medication
- 60% of all patients cannot identify their own medicines
- 30 to 50% of all patients ignore or otherwise compromise instructions on how to take medication
- 23% of nursing home admissions are related to improper self-administration of medicine
- 12 to 20% of patients take other people's medicines
- \$8.5 billion is spent annually on hospital admissions just for patients who do not take their medications as prescribed

So, you can see why healthcare providers are so interested in motivating their patients to modify their lifestyle and/or follow medical advice. Yet, they find motivating these patients to be hopelessly difficult.

The huge amount of frustration on the part of healthcare providers over the decades in terms of motivating patients to change has sparked interest in how people change and how to encourage them to change. The most notable research in this area has been done by a health psychologist named James Prochaska who, beginning in the early 1990's, suggested that people go through a process or continuum of change that is characterized by their movement from no motivational readiness to change all the way through making the change and keeping it ongoing. This research and other research in this area suggests that...guess what...you can't motivate anyone else! It suggests that healthcare providers stop trying to change people or even motivate them but that they will do much better with their patients if they will simply assess where the patient is, right now, in terms of his/her readiness to change and give the patient the information or encouragement they need *just to move to the next stage of readiness to change only*. Does this kind of approach using small, baby steps sound familiar? It should because we have discussed it specifically in terms of the first and third laws of life. You can learn more about these stages of change by searching for "Transtheoretical Model" on the internet. Unfortunately, even though Prochaska's work is well known it is still too little

implemented by many healthcare providers who continue to beat their head against the question “why can’t I make these patients change or motivate them to do so?” Wrong question. Wrong direction.

The last big arena with which most of us have experience is religion/spirituality. I got a very good taste of what it means to be a leader in a spiritual environment when I was a Catholic priest from 1983-1990. Before then I was a very active member of my parishes. Leaders in this arena also want their people to change and try hard to motivate them with very little, if any, success. I know, I used to be one of those leaders and I tried to motivate others, too. I also had the same zero level of success rate. I couldn’t figure out why. I was suggesting that people try doing some things that I knew would help their relationship with God, I urged them to decrease doing things that would hurt that relationship, and I just didn’t see much movement. I mean, these people came to church, right? They said they wanted a spiritual life, right? They seemed like people who wanted more out of life, didn’t they? So, how come my attempts to motivate them failed? These attempts failed and your religious/spiritual leader’s attempts fail because they can never succeed. They cannot succeed because these attempts are built on the totally erroneous idea that these leaders can actually motivate their people. Business leaders can’t, healthcare providers can’t, but religious leaders are going to be able to do so? Nope, they can’t either. Even for the highest, most noble, most ethereal, most selfless and giving motives and actions—you cannot motivate anyone else. The law of life applies in every arena: business, healthcare, religion, personal lives, and personal relationships. The law is neutral, as all laws of life are, it is blind, and it is ineluctable. We obey it or we break our hearts trying to work around it. By now I think you have gotten the idea—it is a law. So, how DO you help people move toward doing something? Great question. Thought you’d never ask.

First, you have to completely dump the idea that you can “motivate” someone else by doing or saying something to them. You cannot apply motivation to someone like sunscreen lotion. Get rid of the word “motivate”, as a verb, from your vocabulary because, as we seen above, it just isn’t an action you can actually perform. Second, realize that although motivation is not something you can do to someone else, it really does exist—but not as a verb. It exists as a noun—a word that describes a real thing. Motivation already exists, as a real drive, within each and every one of us because every person already has some desire for something. This desire is just part of who they uniquely are. Since every one of us is very different, the constellation of these desires, the exact components of them, is also unique to each one of us. Not only are these individual desires different, but also the levels of each one of these desires is unique. To make matters even more complex, the things we want and the various levels of these desires are not static but change as we go through life. So, what, I want, how much I want it, and how much I am willing to do to get it morphs at different times and situations in my (and your) life. The desire for these things and the willingness to take action to achieve them IS motivation. You are motivated when you feel a desire catalyzing you to do something to achieve or get what you want. In fact the word, “motivation” is related to the words “motion” and “motive”, both of which describe getting up and doing something because we want what we can get when we have taken action.

This is why you cannot “motivate” someone else—because as we saw in the first law—you are only really able to change your own behavior and cannot, despite how much you may want to do so, change any one else’s or “make” them do or want anything. What motivates us and what we are willing to do to get it is about our own behavior over which we alone possess the power and for which we alone are responsible.

Third, while you can't "motivate" anyone else you can significantly help them move forward by tapping their already existing motivation. How? By really listening deeply to the clues that point to where their motivation might lie and how strong it is. You can hear their (and your) motivation expressed as a desire to get or increase something, a desire to avoid or decrease something, an expression of satisfaction at having attained something or as frustration that the desire has not yet been fulfilled for some reason. You may hear these clues at or near the surface of what someone is telling you or you may have to really tune in to what you are hearing beneath the surface--desires residing in their heart. What is it that is the deepest desire or, at least, the most potent one? What is the truly desired goal? What is really wanted and how much energy can you hear/see/feel behind this desire/goal/achievement? People want what they want even if we don't agree with it and to help them move forward we need to help them get clear about what they want--NOT what we want for them--and help them think through what, specifically, they might need to say/do/think to move toward what they want. Be clear, the assistance you are providing them, if they need it and ask for it is not you motivating them. It is you helping them tap into their own existing motivation. You might provide some very valuable encouragement that all of us need at times but your support is not motivating them. It may well, though, help them fire up their motivation but motivation, like happiness, is an inside job--no one can do it for you and you cannot do it for anyone else.

Let's talk briefly about what leaders can do to help others with motivation since the issue of motivation, especially in the business arena, has been the subject of decades of research, theorizing, model building, etc. Unfortunately, no theory of motivation has ever really stood the test of time. No detailed analysis of it in terms of extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation, no models of it or motivational methods have been particularly successful. This has been because they have mostly been founded on the idea that a leader can motivate followers and we learned above that such an idea is impossible. As a leader, what *can* you do? You will spend your time wisely not in throwing what you think is motivation at your people but in really hearing what each one of them wants for his/her life and encouraging them to go for it in the context of the situation in which you both are. One of the reasons leaders, especially business leaders, don't already do this is that it takes lots of time and energy and leaders often say they don't have that kind of time and energy to spend on their people. Stop now and think about that view. It is really sad and misguided, isn't it? If a leader doesn't have time and energy to spend on his/her people, how can the leader expect the people to follow him/her? And if no one wants to follow you...are you a leader? So, how do business leaders respond? Why they set up a reward system that they think will "motivate" everyone equally. But since we know that every person's motivations are different and at different levels, how can one system work? It can't and it doesn't but it is infinitely easier to do that and say the

motivation issue is handled than to actually take the time to learn what truly motivates each follower, to tap into the motivation that already burns within them, to work with that person to create a plan that allows the person to move toward what they really want, and to figure out how to align that with the goal the person needs to achieve for the business or organization or church or in their personal life.

Imagine, for a moment, that you worked in an organization or were a member of a church or a patient of a doctor or a friend or a child of some "leader" who really spent the time listening to and learning what you deeply wanted and needed? The leader did not make assumptions about what you wanted or needed, did not figure that you wanted or needed what other people did or even s/he did, and understood that your deepest desires were powerfully motivating to you. Imagine now that this leader even rephrased these, your desires, and repeated them back to you to make sure s/he really understood and gladly accepted your corrections until s/he got it absolutely right. How much would you feel heard and appreciated? An incredible amount, right? Now imagine the leader told you that s/he also wanted to see you achieve what you wanted and would like to help you do that by linking up what you really, deeply want with something you will need to achieve to move the business, church, your health, personal goals, etc. forward? Would you be interested? Yes, probably very much so. This is the way you, as a formal leader or an informal one like a friend or family member, can help someone move forward. Not by trying to motivate them but by listening to what already motivates them and then helping them see how they can move themselves toward that goal and take the business, church, their health, etc. along with them. Help them link what it is they may need to do with what they deeply want to do or achieve and you will tap the power of their existing motivation.

Let's go back to the idea presented first in this chapter: you want someone to do something and, despite your attempts to motivate them, they do nothing. How, specifically, can you use what you have learned about tapping into their existing motivation and link to their desires to move them forward in what you are asking them to do? You might be a friend of theirs, a family member, someone who shares membership in a group with them, or like above, a leader of theirs at some level. What are the basic steps to follow to do what you can to encourage forward movement on their part? Let me outline them for you here and before you read them you must understand that there is no magic in them. These steps will not give you power over the other person or can you "make" them say, do, or think anything they do not wish. That would violate the first law of life and so cannot happen. These steps may, though, give you a much better ability to encourage them and highlight for them why doing what you are asking them to do will help others and help them. They are going to require something very, very hard for you: you are going to have to completely forget about yourself and what you want while you do them. If you pretend to do these or try to fake it, they will see through you and will see that what you really want is to manipulate them. That will kill any current and future efforts to help them or to get them to help you. It will also significantly damage the relationship and you will have moved the relationship thousands of steps backward—not the way you want to go or want the other to go. So,

put yourself on the back burner without checking yourself to see how you are cooking. Put the other person completely first while you work with them.

Step 1: Listen. As I suggested earlier, people will listen to you much more and be much more willing to cooperate with you if you first listen to them. You will probably have to listen first—even though you want to be heard you must understand that you will need to listen deeply to them first so that they will then listen to you. Be a leader: you go first and engage them in a conversation about what they really want and need. Listen, without judgment to what they tell you and simply accept their desires or goals as legitimately theirs and perfectly reasonable ones to have. Listening is very, very powerful and is almost a lost art. People are literally dying to have someone really listen to them. Be that person and you will earn their respect and willingness to listen to you.

Step 2: Repeat. Sum up what you have heard them say and repeat it back to them. Tell them you really want to make sure you understand them and want to paraphrase back to them what they told you to make sure you are clear. Ask them to correct any misunderstandings you still have until you can repeat it back to them in a way that they say “yes, you have it—you understand what I want.”

Step 3: Ask. Ask them how you can help them achieve what you both now understand is what they want. Remember, you are putting yourself on hold now—don’t throw in what YOU want or want the other to do at this point. Really seek advice from them about what you can do to help them achieve their goal or desire. You could even take notes—that would blow their minds! Get clear on what they need or want from you to help them. Repeat it back until they say you have it.

Step 4: Plan. Decide, with them, when and what you will be doing first to be of help to them as they work toward their goal. You might even be able to do that first thing immediately. If so, do it immediately. If not, create with them a real, doable plan for when you will.

Step 5: Share. Now that you have really listened and are actually going to help them (or have already taken done the first thing to help them) ask them if you can share one of your goals or desires. If you have really been focusing on them up to this point I can almost guarantee they will say “yes, go ahead.” Without any resentment or anger about how they might not have done what you wanted in the past, share honestly with them what you want. Acknowledge that you are not proud of the way you have hounded them in the past and you will not do that again. Let them know why you want them to be involved in the desire or goal you have and why their involvement is important to you. Don’t presume or assume they already know that, tell them openly.

Step 6: Link. Ask them how both of you can win. Make sure they know you are not satisfied until they win and that you want to win, too. Look for ways to link their motivation for their desire or goal with movement toward your desire or goal. It might be as simple as “let’s do this: let’s work on your goal for two hours on Saturday morning

and then let's work on mine for the next two hours—will that work for you?" Again, if you have been selfless and open up to this point it is highly unlikely that they will say "no."

Step 7: Thank. Keep your commitment to help them achieve what they want and make sure you thank them for helping you achieve what you want. Tell them very specifically (review the second law of life for how to give specific verbal reinforcement) what they did and why it was so helpful. Make your work together something that truly helps you both win AND is reinforced verbally and, perhaps, in other ways like special little treats or things you know they really like. Let them know that you are not out to just get what you want and then you are done with them. There is a relationship here, remember. You need to nourish it to make it grow.

Let's sum up what we've learned about motivation. Motivation is a desire for something and the willingness to take some action to achieve it. Everyone has some level of motivation for something they uniquely want even if it is not something we want at all. The levels of these specific desires may be relatively permanent or may change often within all of us but we can learn about these goals and desires by really, deeply listening for them. In fact, listening alone may be enough to encourage the person to act! We know that acting is important if they are going to achieve what they want or need and we can't do it for them. In fact we absolutely cannot now and will not ever be able to "motivate" them to do anything. We can, though, by following some basic steps in listening to them, offering our help, sharing our own goals and motivation, and linking our goals/motivation with theirs encourage much more forward movement than we ever got or could get by our vain attempts to "motivate" them through verbal punishment. We know now that motivation already lies within them, maybe deep beneath the surface such that they, themselves, are not even really aware of it. Last, we know that as we tap into their existing motivation we can not only encourage them to move forward, we will be making a huge investment in our relationship with them as we work together to achieve both of our goals. Imagine the relationship of mutual encouragement and achievement that you can have by totally changing the way you approach the idea of motivation. Now that is motivating!