

Project Team Motivators and Demotivators

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1. INTRODUCTION

The leader of a corporation or project is the individual who must ultimately be willing to take responsibility for results. Within the context of an organization or team made up of individuals, it is the collective performance of the individuals, as a team, that defines the results of the whole. While it can be said that the best motivation is internal motivation as opposed to external motivation, the leader is ultimately the one responsible for creating the conditions where motivation can thrive.

In any job, there are circumstances which motivate and those which demotivate. It is up to the leader to be aware of which is which. According to the Pareto principle (the 80/20 rule), it is essential for the leader to know what factors most contribute to results, to help guide his or her focus.

This article discusses: (i) typical motivators and demotivators on construction sites; (ii) the Foreman Delay Survey, which is a good way to identify and eliminate obstruction factors and demotivators; (iii) Herzberg's principles concerning motivators and demotivators; and (iv) my experiences from managing construction projects and life in general.

This article is a slightly modified chapter from my book, *On Time and Under Budget: The Ultimate Power of Team Leadership*, published in 2014.

2. MOTIVATORS AND DEMOTIVATORS

Below is a list of motivating factors from a survey of twelve construction sites. If you work in construction, make sure that you have these things in place:

- Good relationships among all people involved;
- Good orientation program;
- Good safety program;
- Pay;
- Overtime pay;
- Recognition;
- Defined goals;
- Open house and project tour;
- A well-planned project; and
- Suggestions solicited.

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The demotivators, things to avoid and/or eliminate, are as follows:

- Disrespectful treatment;
- Lack of material and tool availability;
- Having to do work over;
- Crew discontinuity;
- Project confusion;
- Lack of recognition;
- Ineffective utilization of skills;
- Incompetent personnel;
- Lack of cooperation among crafts;
- Overcrowding;
- Poor inspection programs;
- Communication breakdowns;
- Unsafe conditions; and
- Lack of participation in decision making.

3. FOREMAN DELAY SURVEY

In the construction industry, the Foreman Delay Survey is a way to identify and eliminate obstructive factors and demotivators. The following are the steps:

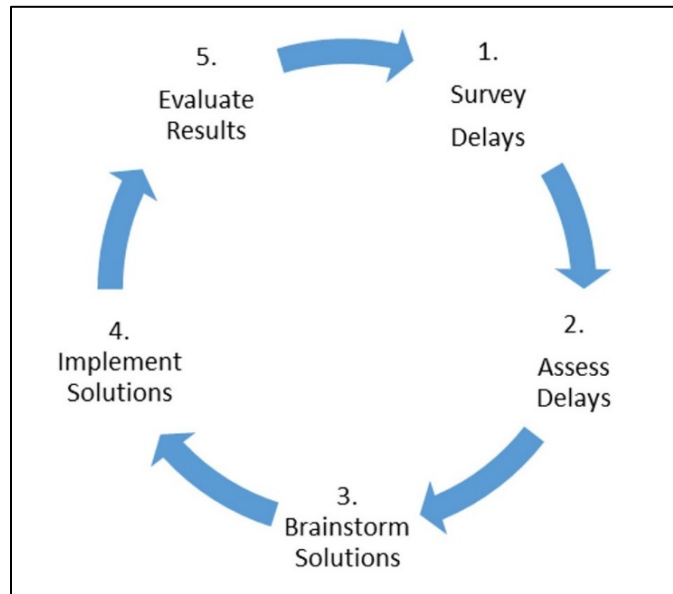
First, the foreman completes a daily survey of project delays for a week so as to identify what is causing the holdups.

Second, the delays are evaluated, solutions brainstormed, and improved working methods are implemented.

Finally, the results of the new ways are analyzed, and the cycle starts again, if necessary.

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Figure 1
Foreman Delay Survey Cycle



One might think that a good supervisor does not need to do this, but I have applied these principles to projects thought to be going smoothly and has always found that the Foreman Delay Survey makes a difference. Even the front-line foremen are surprised when they quantify their delays.

For example, on a recent project, I had a superintendent who, for some reason, did not want to hear about problems from the workers or the foremen. People were pulling me aside to tell me, the project manager, about problems they were having in the field. I noticed the superintendent's behavior whenever a problem was raised by someone under his command. He took it as a personal attack, instead of a call for help. This was an ideal situation for the Foreman Delay Survey.

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Figure 2
Sample Foreman Delay Survey Results

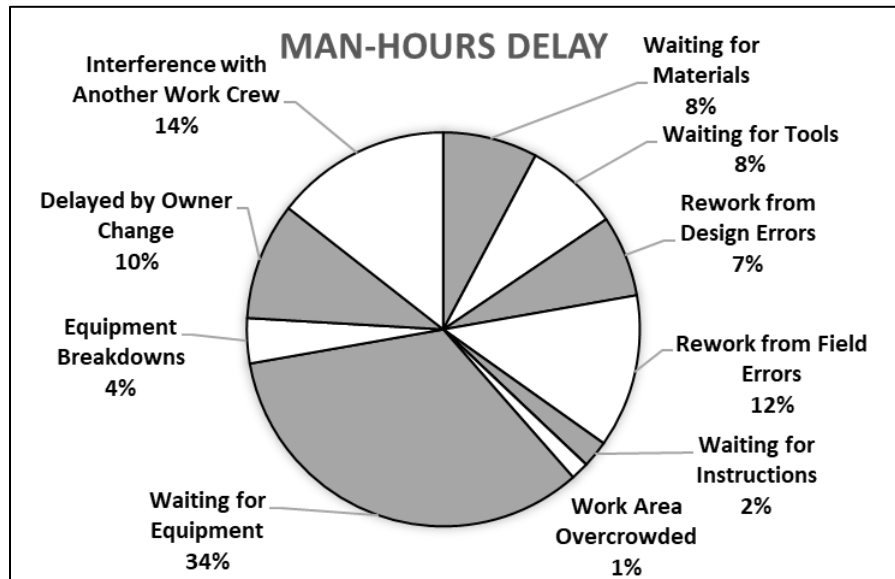


Figure 2 shows the results from the first week of that survey. The total delay time was 9% of the total available working hours. Frustrating delays can have a compounding effect on labor motivation. This is because as workers become more frustrated, they lose focus on safety and their jobs, leading to more frustration and more delays. In addition, frustration is one of the four mental states that leads to accidents. Most delays are management controlled, so management should use this technique as a listening tool to uncover problems. Once the problems are identified, the root causes can be identified and eliminated.

Having used this process on multiple projects, I have found that it takes about three weeks to achieve the organizational alignment necessary to eliminate most of the delays. The process should be used frequently, if not continuously, as a project moves through various stages. Most delays are management controlled, so it is absolutely critical that management uses this technique as a listening tool to uncover the root of the problems.

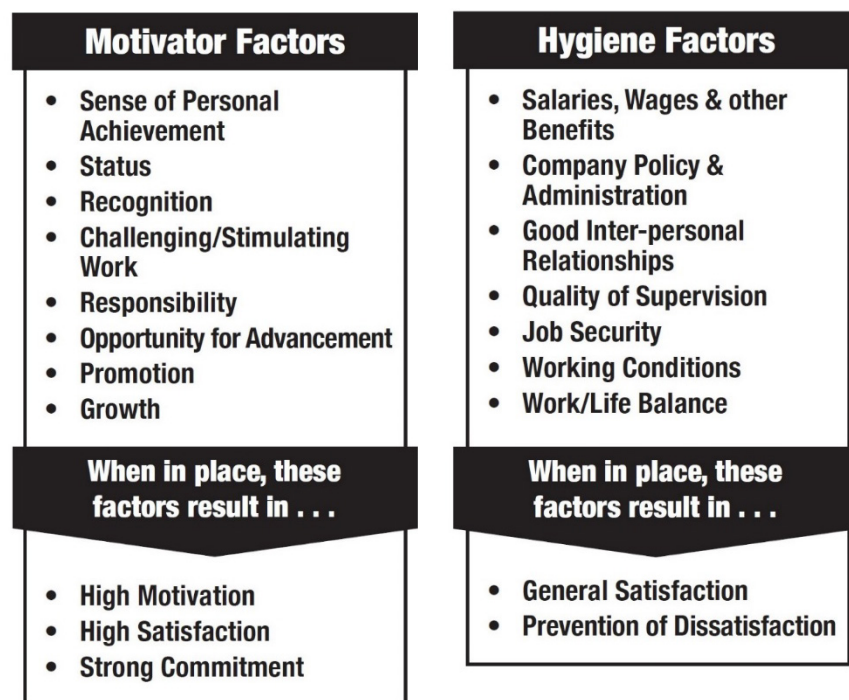
When combined with goal setting and the other principles, the Foreman Delay Survey is a simple and effective way to remove the problems, which lead to frustration and low morale, and consequently, a way of eliminating one of the root causes of accidents.

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4. HERZBERG'S PRINCIPLES

Frederick Irving Herzberg was an American psychologist who became one of the most recognized and influential names in business management. He developed what he called the Motivation-Hygiene Theory of human motivation, or the “Dual Structure Theory.” According to this theory, people are influenced by two sets of factors—Motivators and Hygienes (Demotivators).

Figure 3
Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory of Motivation



Herzberg conducted workplace surveys to identify the factors which resulted in increased or decreased motivation. The survey responses identified the factors, how frequently they appeared in the workplace, and the strength of their impact on motivation or demotivation. Not surprisingly, the factors leading to motivation are not the same as those leading to demotivation, as shown in Figure 3.

Another way to apply the findings of the Motivation-Hygiene Theory in practice is through vertical job loading. Figure 4 is a summary table of the steps that Herzberg identified for the process of vertical loading.

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Figure 4
Herzberg's Principles of Vertical Job Loading

Principle	Motivators Involved
1. Removing some controls while retaining accountability	Responsibility and personal achievement
2. Increasing the accountability of individuals for their work	Responsibility and recognition
3. Giving a person a complete natural unit of work (module, division, area, etc.,...)	Responsibility, achievement, and recognition
4. Granting additional authority to employees in their activity; job freedom	Responsibility, achievement, and recognition
5. Making periodic reports directly available to the workers themselves rather than to supervisors	Internal recognition
6. Introducing new and more difficult tasks not previously handled	Growth and learning
7. Assigning individual specific or specialized tasks, enabling them to become experts	Responsibility, growth, and advancement

5. TRUE EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a buzzword which too often gets thrown around like a basketball without ever making it into the hoop! True empowerment means trusting people to do the right thing, and then giving them the freedom to succeed. When we saw how much time was being lost due to the lack of tools and supplies, we empowered employees by giving them the authority to write field requisitions for the tools and materials they needed to be successful. One Thursday morning, after compiling the results from a Foreman Delay Survey, I met with every worker on the project after the morning safety meeting and laid out the new procedure. While holding up a copy of the new material requisition book, I explained that they were now empowered to take their success into their own hands. As part of their look-ahead task planning, they were to identify the tools, materials, and equipment that they would need to perform their assigned tasks and fill out a requisition for it. The results were remarkable! There was such pent-up frustration over lack of supplies that the onrush of requests was like opening the floodgates. The requests kept me and the rest of the management team busy, but we quickly saw the success of our plan as delays were virtually eliminated. Of course, before the materials or tools were purchased, they had to get final review and approval from the superintendent or me to avoid duplication and excess.

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6. LIFE LESSONS

While thinking about encouraging motivators and eliminating demotivators in the workplace, it is a good idea to look around to make sure that we are not sabotaging ourselves by the very nature of our self-created environment. Whether it is a messy closet, a long overdue visit to the dentist, or other unfinished business, there are things in your personal environment that can either empower you or drain your mental energy. These are analogous to the Herzberg Motivators and Hygienes that exist in the workplace, and to be your best, they are things you need to take care of if they need attention. Start the process by cleaning your closets. Then mentally look at every aspect of your life as a closet and do the same. Do what needs to be done, keep what is useful, and discard the rest.

About the Author



Michael J. Vallez, P.E. MBA, Lean Six Sigma, is a Senior Executive Consultant with Long International. Mr. Vallez has over 40 years of hands on and leadership experience in project management, engineering/construction management, cost and schedule control, change management, claims, dispute resolution, and mine and process engineering. He has served in executive management roles in industry, including both the owner and contractor sides with companies and contractors working on world-class projects for oil and gas companies, power companies, international mining companies, and other institutions. He has a proven ability to organize and integrate the work of multi-disciplined technical specialists and project construction teams to achieve corporate financial goals and objectives of ROI, safety, operational performance, cost, and time. In all, he has provided leadership on several billion dollars' worth of projects in the Mining, Power, Oil and Gas, Industrial, Heavy Civil and Commercial sectors. Mr. Vallez has written several books on the subjects of construction management, safety, and effective project leadership. Mr. Vallez is based in Salt Lake City, Utah, and can be contacted at mvallez@long-intl.com or (801) 502-0951.