

Motivation of Employees and Volunteers in Youth Serving Organizations

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Introduction

The youth development field offers a wide range of employment and volunteering options. Researchers from Clemson University's Youth Development Leadership program conducted a study to determine what motivates an employee or volunteer to serve in the youth development field, to choose a specific organization with which to work, and to remain employed with that organization.

In order to study the motivations, the team developed a series of twelve questions and interviewed two paid employees and two unpaid volunteers from the Run Hard Running Team (Run Hard). Run Hard is an eight week elementary and middle school program that emphasizes nine core areas that promote success. The core areas are peer pressure, perseverance, wise choices, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, honesty, respect, and honor. Run Hard operates in seven regions across four states and serves approximately 1,500 students per year. Participants gain both endurance-based and character-based instruction, while training to complete a 5K race.

Literature Review

As each person has different reasoning for their decisions, we should consider why certain people choose certain activities. Within the theory of intrinsic motivation, people look for the best challenge and become motivated based on their need for competence or self-motivation. Another theory within intrinsic motivation is the interest theory, which includes both feeling-related and value-related interest and the importance they carry for an individual or situation (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). The researchers also have to consider work-based motivation. Work-based motivation takes into account the design of the job and how it makes a person feel validated for their work. In an effort to make employees and volunteers more productive, employers have to create a position that entices and encourages an employee or volunteer to

want to do their best as part of personal, professional, and business pride (Gallagher and Einhorn, 2015).

Motivational Beliefs, Values and Goals, by Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Allan Wigfield (2002), is an article that explains different theories of motivation and how they affect the expectancies of behavior of young people. Dividing the motivational theories into four main parts, Eccles and Wigfield link competence and expectancy, discuss the reasons why individuals participate in diverse activities, combine expectancy and value constructs, and draw connections between motivational and cognitive developments. From the discussions, motivational researchers understand why people decide to pursue a wide range of activities and how their goals, values and beliefs affect those behaviors (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

Motivation Theory and Job Design, by William E. Gallagher, Jr. and Hillel J. Einhorn (2015) convey how ability and motivation together will create productivity. In order to be successful, a business needs high productivity. Those in management positions have a high concern for productivity. This article discusses how in recent years, there has been a shift in job design to increase productivity from a specialized focus job type, to a job that is based on intrinsic motivation for work rewards. Gallagher and Einhorn set out to describe the different job design methods through job enlargement, rotation, and enrichment. They explore the motivational stereotypes on which the methods are based through the study of Maslow's needs hierarchy. They also present new job designs and evaluate the results. Lastly, they discuss how theory and practice work together to help job design programs. In the ever changing professional world, the results show that job design techniques are useful for management, but not an overall answer to use motivation alone for productivity. More research is needed for a program to be developed (Gallagher and Einhorn, 2015).

Methodology

The research team developed questions that would be relevant to motivation and the position at Run Hard for the employees and volunteers. The researchers then contacted Run Hard and asked employees and volunteers to participate in the research interview. Four participated in the study, two paid employees and two unpaid volunteers. A research team member interviewed the employees and volunteers through face-to-face conversations, by phone, and via email. The interview questioned their motivation for joining Run Hard and the responsibilities of their position.

Results

Volunteer #2 joined Run Hard as a requirement for her Sports Management major and because she connected with the two employees who interviewed her. Volunteer #1 got involved because he believed in the vision of the founder, Jesse Harmon, and he saw it as an opportunity to become involved in his community. The two employees began to work with the organization because they believed in the mission and had personal relationships with the founder. Employee #2 explained that she also got involved because she had skills that the founder deemed helpful to get the program started. Her volunteer work with the organization continued to expand until she joined full time.

When asked why they chose a youth-serving organization, responders gave us an opportunity to look into what ultimately motivates them: passion for youth. Employee #1 said she has a “heart for young people, wants to love and train them to see good in themselves” (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015). Employee #2 stated that she believes “people have a responsibility to pour into kids and help them become better people and better

citizens” (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015). Volunteer #1 explained that he became involved in Run Hard because he has a passion for youth development in general.

The interviewees all stated their continual involvement in the organization is due to the difference they feel they make in the lives of youth. All of the responders are intrinsically motivated because they feel qualified for their assigned tasks, get to use their skills well, and glean enjoyment from seeing youth accomplish things they personally did not think possible. Employee #2 said that she is rewarded “by the impact that the program has on kids, and feels that building something from nothing is rewarding” (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015). Volunteer #2 shares this belief, stating that she “is not rewarded for exceptional performance directly, but it’s a reward to know how many kids are going to benefit from the work that I do this summer” (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015).

Analysis

There were several examples of the self-interest theory of motivation in the responses of both employees and volunteers. Employee #2 stated that she enjoys “doing marketing with excellence. I think I add a certain level of professionalism to the organization and push the founder to be better than he is” (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015). This is a clear example of “value-related valence,” a component of self-interest that attributes “personal significance or importance to an object or activity” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 114). According to Eccles and Wigfield, another important aspect of interest theory is “feeling-related valence” which is the motivation one feels when they have positive feelings as a result of “involvement, stimulation, or flow” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 114). Volunteer #1 expressed these positive feelings when he shared the enjoyment he receives from seeing the difference their organization is making in the lives of youth and the ripple effect it is having on the community.

Volunteer #2 supported the self-motivation theory when she stated that part of the satisfaction she receives from working with Run Hard comes from the expansion of the program into new schools and helping those schools write curriculum. This lends credence to Maslow's needs hierarchy in her gaining "pleasure from successful achievement, the exercise of a personal skill, and the acceptance of responsibility" (Gallagher, 2015, p. 363). Employee #1 is an example of someone motivated by their desire for competence in a challenging role, another important component of self-motivation theory. She discussed how she feels qualified to work for the organization because she has "20 years of experience in the field of education, has people skills, is task oriented, and is able to communicate the operation of the program to new schools, coaches, and families" (Anonymous, personal communication, July 4, 2015).

Recommendations

The employees and volunteers of Run Hard are motivated by a passion to improve the lives of youth and make an impact in their families, schools, and local communities. Like all organizations, there are things that Run Hard can improve on to minimize their employee and volunteer turnover and in turn maximize their impact on youth. One area for improvement would be creating a formal process for giving and receiving evaluation from leadership within the organization. Another recommendation we would make is improving the placement of volunteers within the organization. Both volunteers felt like they needed more assigned tasks to accomplish. Volunteer #2 also believes that when tasks are given they can sometimes be vague, leaving her to wonder if she is performing the task according to how leadership would want it done. With the application of these two recommendations we feel like Run Hard can continue to improve the impact they make on youth for generations to come.

References

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Appendix

Employee Questions

1. What made you chose to work for Run Hard?
2. Which of your job responsibilities do you like the most? The least?
3. Do you feel qualified to accomplish the tasks that are assigned to you by your supervisor?
4. Do you feel that you are given reasonable deadlines to complete tasks?
5. Does the management at Run Hard meet your expectations toward you as an employee?
6. Do you receive any satisfaction from your job at Run Hard? Why or why not?
7. Do your responsibilities at Run Hard change often?
8. Do you receive any evaluation from your supervisor?
9. Do you feel that there is opportunity for advancement at Run Hard?
10. Are you rewarded for exceptional performance? If so, how?
11. Are you given the opportunity to choose job duties based on your interest level in those duties?
12. Why did you choose to work with a youth-serving organization?

Volunteer Questions

1. What made you chose to volunteer for Run Hard?
2. Which of your job responsibilities do you like the most? The least?
3. Do you feel qualified to accomplish the tasks that are assigned to you by your Run Hard management?
4. Do you feel that you are given reasonable deadlines to complete tasks?
5. Does the management at Run Hard meet your expectations toward you as a volunteer?
6. Do you receive any satisfaction from volunteering at Run Hard? Why or why not?

7. Do your responsibilities at Run Hard change often?
8. Do you receive any evaluation from Run Hard management?
9. Do you feel that there is opportunity for advancement at Run Hard?
10. Are you rewarded for exceptional performance? If so, how?
11. Are you given the opportunity to choose job duties based on your interest level in those duties?
12. Why did you choose to work with a youth-serving organization?