

## “Carrots and Sticks”

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**When your internal motivation is properly aligned with your external commitments then you get strong positive action. Wouldn't it be good if we could arrange things so that everything that you choose to give your attention to could be aligned this way?**

How would that be for you or your business?

Unfortunately, if you're anything like most people, then it's often the case that you just can't get started on something you know you ought to. Or maybe even when you've started something you just can't find the energy to keep it going, or finish it. Meredith Belbin recognised these generalisations in his “shapers”, “company workers” and “completer finishers”. You might already be aware of your own preferences in these areas from detailed tests carried out by your HR department.

However, there's an easier way we can explore these generalisations of people's behavioural preferences. And it's one that we sometimes use when working on an individual basis with our coaching clients. It's just as applicable in a 'company' or business context. And it's very simple. On a purely personal basis, with just yourself in mind, ask yourself:

Which of these am I best at?

- ★ Starting things
- ★ Changing or maintaining things
- ★ Stopping or finishing things

There, that was easy wasn't it? So what about it? Well, interestingly these three preferences have been considered to produce the following situations in life. If you're good at starting things then you're most likely to find yourself **being** who you want to be. If changing and maintaining things is more to your style then you'll tend to find yourself **doing** what you want to do. When you're best at stopping and finishing things then the chances are that you'll **have** what you want to have. Now, I've been referring to these as preferences because of course they're interrelated, everyone has something from all three. And there are some that we're better at and some we're worst at.

And at this time of the year we naturally find ourselves reviewing the past twelve months, don't we? What are the things we've started? What have we given time and energy to maintaining and what have we drawn a line

underneath. And perhaps equally importantly, what are the things that we could have started, could have kept going and could have completed? And how come we did none of those things?

Wouldn't it be great if we could better align our internal motivations with those things that we want to achieve – starting maintaining or stopping things? Whether we want to learn to play an instrument, speak another language, keep our office organised, make sure our e-mail is managed effectively every day, deliver against that project, finish that report or finally complete decorating that spare bedroom. Of course, motivation is the key.

As human beings we tend to fall in to one of two motivation camps. We're either pretty good at keeping ourselves up and working towards the goal we want – you know, the glass is always half-full. Or we tend to be significantly better at demotivating ourselves - good at thinking up all manner of excuses and reasons and activities rather than actually getting on with what's necessary and the glass is always half-empty.

This is an important distinction to make amongst individuals. Generally we are either motivated **towards** what we want or **away from** what we don't want. It's driven by our values and what's important to us. It's where our personality type of **approach** (attraction, reward) or **avoidance** (repulsion, punishment) is evidenced. It's a **filter** on the way we perceive and interpret the world around us.

Again, this is something you can begin to explore easily yourself. We normally think of a specific context when we're considering this filter, so pick **one** of the questions below, clear your mind then ask yourself that **one** question (and write down whatever comes in to your head – keep asking that question and writing until you've got all your possible answers down on paper):

- ★ What do you want in a job?
- ★ What do you want in a relationship?

- ★ What do you want to do with your life?
- ★ What's important to you about what you do?

Look at what you've written down: what did you write down first? Was this **"towards"** or **"away from"** or a mixture of both?

There are essentially five kinds of behaviour that we can see from responses to your chosen question:

1. If all that you've written are statements about what you want then you can be classified as a **"towards"** person. You'll find that carrots rather than sticks motivate you. In fact if anyone were to try to motivate you with a stick the chances are that you'd get more than a little angry about it. In a business context perks and benefits will motivate you, harsh disciplinary consequences will not.
2. You may have discovered that mostly you are motivated by what you want, but are also influenced by what you want to avoid. This means that you choose to move towards what you want and also take possible negative consequences into consideration.
3. You may find that you are equally motivated towards what you want and away from what you don't want. You try to give equal consideration to all possible outcomes.
4. Primarily you've written down the things you want to avoid and you've also captured something of what you actually want as well. You will try to take in to account all possible negative consequences while, to a lesser extent, capturing what you'd like to achieve.
5. The complete opposite of a **"towards"** motivated person would have written down all the things they wish to avoid and nothing of what they want to happen. As an **"away from"** motivated person you'll tend to be motivated by your fears. You'll need something big and negative to stir you into taking action. Carrots aren't appealing to you, but you can imagine what the stick might feel like!

It's also interesting to consider whether a person that is strongly motivated towards something is actually expressing a move away from something. Care, as ever, is needed in interpreting and exploring personal behavioural preferences. In a real-life situation we would be on the look out for signs of congruence and incongruence in a person's responses to give us extra qualifying information.

In setting personal goals for the year ahead, wouldn't it be more sensible if those goals were properly aligned with your motivational preferences? If carrots are what you need to motivate yourself – don't use the language of sticks in your goals.

You might want also to check out our earlier article **"Inspiring Progress: Motivating Goals"**<sup>†</sup> to make sure that you set goals and outcomes in a way that means you can achieve them much more easily.

Just as an experiment, you might want to ask those same motivation questions of your organisation or business (I'm fascinated by the concept of a personified business!). Make a guess as to which 'it' tends to be best at. And how is that reflected in the organisation? Does it tend to **have** what it wants to have, **do** what it wants to do or **be** what it wants to be?

In a business context the same goal setting guidelines apply, both for the organisation as a collective whole and the staff working in it. The goals you set need to be aligned with the prevalent motivational preference. If they aren't, then one result will be assured – the goals won't be achieved.

Plus you might want to consider how you write your promotional materials, your project proposals and so on. Align them all with the appropriate motivational preference and see them fly!

There are other distinctions we can consider in this complex area of motivation and yet with what you've learned by reading this article you can begin to identify how the people around you get their motivation to act. And now you know how to begin to influence them.

Just be sure that you follow an ecological approach. What's that? We'll cover that in more detail in a later article, but for now, just ask yourself – does it **"feel"** right – am I doing the best by them and for me? Only you can know the answer to that so let it guide you in how you use these insights!

So, what have you discovered or had confirmed about yourself? And how might you begin to make use of what you've discovered? And when will you start using this learning? If not straight away, then almost certainly as you sit down and make your plans for the year ahead – and you will be doing that soon won't you?

<sup>†</sup> See <http://library.creatifica.com/insight/>