



TO MOTIVATE OR NOT TO DEMOTIVATE, THIS IS THE QUESTION

During my career I went through different kinds of tasks, positions and responsibilities. And of course, one of the effects was that I was confronted with a number of superiors, so I was able to learn from them and their experiences. And like everybody else in business, my superiors also made mistakes from time to time, but what I really kept in mind, were the mistakes they did and which concerned and discouraged me personally. Therefore **I promised myself already at the very early stage of my career that I would rather not demotivate my staff members or associates at all than to motivate them too much.**

Naturally, we are all human beings and therefore it's not possible for managers or leading staff not to demotivate anyone, because every page has two sides and – in normal circumstances – a positive issue for one person may create a negative result for another.

But I think that there are a lot of small signals and symbols, which could be avoided by managers and leaders without big efforts. And this would surely lead to less demotivation of their staff.

It was in 2001, when entertainment started to merge with telecommunications and the first mobile phones with build-in MP3 player and camera appeared on the market.

At this time I attended a very important project meeting with employees from different hierarchical levels late in the evening. The mood was already very tight, because the project seemed to be on the edge and all the project team members have been very tired from the job, they did during the previous few weeks, both for their daily operations and for this project. Suddenly, one of the company's Executive Board members appeared, saw the atmosphere and tried to motivate the team with some friendly statements, which were not at all related to the project. He sat down on one of the empty chairs and put his mobile phone on the desk, so that everybody could see it. Once he realized this, he started to demonstrate the special features of his new "state-of-the-art" mobile phone: build-in camera plus MP3 player. After he left the room, one of the employees stood up, said: **"Why the hell does this guy need an MP3 player on his duty mobile phone, probably for listening good music, while we are spending our spare time on the project without being paid for it?"** and left the meeting.

Maybe you as a manager take this for granted and part of your contract, but you may try to see it from your employees' point of view: The Supervisory Board of a bank, which was at this time in the phase of restructuring, nominated a new Top Executive. The bank was not just being reorganized; also a very tough cost-cutting program was implemented. Phone calls from all the employees were observed to eliminate private calls, the number of business magazines was reduced dramatically, salaries have been cut – and this new Top Executive got a new business car. Of course, if you would be in the same position as this gentleman, **you should not apologize for the conditions you agreed** in your management contract **and you don't have to explain to anyone why** the company is purchasing a new car for you, but from my point of view you should consider **if it's the right timing to send such a signal towards your employees.**



One of my friends, she is the Executive Board's "fugleman", had the pleasure to organize a huge event for the – I believe it was the 25th – anniversary of a company. She was very proud to have the honour to do this job, therefore she really gave her best, worked almost day and night, organized everything in every detail in a perfect manner in the best hotel in town, top customers, influential personalities and celebrities have been invited and the most famous jazz band was chosen for the music. Some minutes before the event started her boss took a last look on the script she prepared for the inaugural address, because he was an excellent speaker and was rather used to making off-the-cuff speeches than reading from the paper. And unfortunately one of the ministers, who was suppose to come, didn't appear. Her boss started to yell at her: "Why did you forget to invite the Minister ...?" and before she could react and explain that this was out of her competence, tears came out of her eyes like from a waterfall **and two months of the highest dedication and motivation were destroyed...**

I think there would be a lot more examples to be presented, if we would investigate among employees from different industries on different positions. But I believe that not the big flops make employees sometimes frustrated and discouraged. There are small – from my point of view sometimes unnecessary or at this moment inappropriate – signals and symbols, which will **cause you as a manager or leader much more efforts and resources to "repair" than all the actions you set to motivate someone.**

So, before you increase the number of motivational activities, for instance, by telling your employees constantly what an excellent job they did – regardless if they really deserved it or not – I would try to decrease the number of demotivational actions as exemplified above.

And in case you don't see or feel that you and your behaviour has been the reason for your staff's demotivation, I strongly recommend to you to ask people in your company, who are very close to you, for their very open and honest feedback from time to time ... and by the way: **this will surely also give your management style much more personal touch.**