



## Facilitator — February/March 2011



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### Getting Motivated

Kevin and Jackie Freiberg

Getting Motivated Your attitude is entirely your choice

The New Year's ball dropped on the holidays a month ago.

No more parties to attend; no more gifts to unwrap.

The vacation you saved up all year is gone, and you're back in the office staring at your computer screen. That's enough to put as many as 25 percent of people in the United States into the "postholiday blues" or "dead people working syndrome."

It's also enough to have business leaders pulling their hair out as they think about how to motivate their employees in a world where coasting into a new year is not an option. What can you do to motivate your people? The answer is: nothing. But what you can do as a manager is teach your people to leverage the most powerful attribute they have—the freedom to choose. Motivation is a choice, and the ownership for this choice resides within each employee, not their managers.

#### The Freedom to Choose

The freedom to choose may be the most powerful attribute and precious resource you have in your life. It shapes who you are, how you express yourself, the success you achieve and your influence on the world—including your world at work. You are a product of your choices, not your conditions. Your choices will determine whether you become a person who is truly indispensable or one who is hardly missed.

When you abdicate or abandon this most basic of freedoms, you imprison yourself. You choose to become helpless, powerless, mindless, less influential and less happy. Essentially, you've benched yourself in your own game of life.

The good news is that you are not some sophisticated Pavlovian dog relegated to living a life that is solely dictated by circumstances or conditioning. You can choose the attitude with which you come to work. You can choose whether you get sucked into the "dead people working syndrome." You can choose how much—or how little—of yourself you give to your job. You can choose where you focus your attention. The freedom to choose is yours alone to leverage. No one can grant it to you, and no one can take it away from you.

Motivation is a choice. If you want to enter the new year with a boom instead of a bust—if you want to create a work force that is firing on all cylinders—here are seven choices you must encourage everyone in your organization to make.

#### Choice 1: Be a Player, Not a Bystander

In the game of life, there are players and there are those who shrink from their innate abilities. Players charge onto the field with passion, energy and a desire to win—sometimes they get their hands dirty, their faces sweaty and their bodies bloody and bruised by giving their all to the game. Players influence the outcome of the game; they are fanatical about making the play.

Players focus on the things they can control. Focusing on the things you cannot control depletes your energy. Players ignore the things they cannot do anything about. They simply don't let things outside their control take up too much mental space, or they concentrate on bringing things outside their control into their control.

You can increase your motivation and effectiveness by orders of magnitude simply by asking a question: “Right now, at this moment, given this situation, am I focused on something I can control or obsessing over something I can’t control?” Extraordinary things happen when ordinary people choose to be players, not bystanders.

#### Choice 2: Be Accountable

How many times have you sat in a meeting where people feel paralyzed and heard someone say the following?: “What do ‘they’ (senior management) want? ‘They’ need to share their vision more clearly. ‘They’ (our employees) need to get on board. ‘They’ need to take more initiative. Sales are down because our customers don’t have enough choices. If ‘they’ would only do their jobs we wouldn’t be in this mess. ‘They’ (board of directors) don’t understand the specific nuances of the market realities we face. I wished ‘they’ were better informed.”

What all of these statements have in common is that they reveal our propensity to shift the burden of responsibility. The whole agenda is about what “they” should do to fulfill me, rescue me, relieve my pain, make me happy and complete me. In looking to “them,” our co-dependence is exposed.

Guess what? There is no “they”—only you and me. Your happiness, job satisfaction, sense of accomplishment and ultimate success depend upon you, not them. The biggest problem and the real enemy we face is ourselves. We act as though we are powerless when we are not. Erica Jong, awardwinning novelist and poet said, “Take your life in your own hands and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame.”

When you refuse to shift responsibility, make excuses and blame someone else, you stop being a victim and start gaining more freedom. Choosing to be accountable makes you free to do amazing things.

#### Choice 3: Choose Service Over Self-interest

The “post-holiday blues” is normally just another form of self-loathing. The problem is that the “me-first” mindset rarely delivers the desired outcome. Remember, the world is not here to make you happy.

Your happiness comes from using your gifts to serve the world. Why not start with your colleagues at work? If you dare to live beyond the boundaries of self-concern and self-indulgence and if you walk into work with an unwavering desire to enrich the lives of others, then your ability to make a difference would be far-reaching and profound. Motivation comes from meaning, and meaning is created when we do things that have a positive impact on others.

#### Choice 4: Focus Forward

The busy holidays might be over, but your future isn’t in the rearview mirror. Create a picture in your mind about what you want to accomplish this year.

The most important thing about you today is not where you’ve been, but where you are going. Your energy and motivation in the present are dramatically influenced by your vision of the future. People who are clear about having something significant to do tend to be jazzed about the new year, while those who lack clarity tend to let depression get the best of them. Perhaps that is why the Book of Proverbs says, “Without a vision the people perish.”

As you begin to create a vision for this year, keep in mind that you can focus on what isn’t working, why it can’t be done and who’s to blame, or you can focus on what is working, how it can be done and what you want to achieve. You can be part of the solution or part of the problem.

To focus forward is to move from “Yes, but...” to “Yes, and...” and “What if...?” If you get focused on hitting the ground at full speed after the holidays, you might find your blues will disappear more quickly. If you choose to focus in the rearview mirror and ruminate on the fact that the holidays are over, the blues could get worse.

#### Choice 5: Play to Your Genius

Your work is your signature—a statement about you—so make it a masterpiece! Maybe you anticipate the cubicle walls closing in around you and you’re dreading going back to work. Start thinking about how you can redefine your work so that you have something to look forward to. Turn a normal project into something that has meaning; something that will knock people out of their chairs. Transform the mundane and routine into something exciting. Tony Lepore, the worldrenowned Dancing Cop, spices up his plain-vanilla traffic duties with a lot of fancy footwork, and the crowds in Providence, R.I., love it. Also, the flight attendants at Southwest Airlines often sing the safety announcements— and people actually listen.

To know that your work counts is to know that you count. But you are ultimately responsible for playing to your genius and engaging in work that matters. One thing is for sure, if you engage in work that makes you come alive, the world will beat a path to your door; not a bad recipe for beating the blues.

#### Choice 6: Get It Done

No one is paying you today for what you did yesterday. When you stop bringing something of value to the game, the game is over. Who is most affected by the quality of education you receive? Is it the portfolio of skills and experiences you establish? The personal brand you build? No, it's you. Who is in the best position to determine what you want and need to make a valuable contribution? You. Doesn't it make sense then, that you should be responsible for your own learning?

Declare war on complacency. Become a junction box for knowledge; find a way to get smarter, better and faster. Decide how you are going to stretch, grow, fill the gaps and add new value to your organization. If your life at work has become stagnant, you don't have much to get excited about. No wonder you long for the excitement of the holidays. Making a commitment to learning something new can be very stimulating. The more you stretch, the less time and mental space you will have for the blues.

Choice 7: Risk More — Gain More

If you want this year to be just like last year, then stick to the status quo. However, if you want your attitude to change quickly this year, then start taking some risks.

A life without risk and adventure is a life not fully lived. You will never discover your true capabilities unless you explore the boundaries and test the limits of what you can achieve. Unfortunately, many of us have chosen to surrender the adventure. We prefer the mild, bland and predictable over the hot, spicy and uncertain.

Have you ever heard that voice in your head that calls you out of boredom and into the adventure? Fear keeps you from following it because adventures by definition are dangerous.

Playing it safe—ignoring this voice—will keep you out of harm's way. If you are reluctant to take risks, you will probably never die on Mount Everest or in the shark-infested waters off Australia. You will probably not upset your boss for blowing \$100,000 on a failed project or make your co-workers uncomfortable for revealing the thousandpound elephant in the room. But you will miss the adventure.

Remember, the world—and your life—isn't changed by those who are unwilling to take risks. Experimentation and failure are prerequisites to creativity, innovation and growth.

When it comes to taking risks, the key is to stop getting ready, step through your fears and do something now. You cannot charge into a new year in neutral. The difference between living a big, rich and full life and watching life just happen—between beating the blues and letting them drag you down—is the idea of “do something now.”

The land of intent is littered with “wanna-bes,” “could-bes” and “should've-beens” who pondered, planned and pontificated but failed to act. Quite frankly, your spouse, your children, your boss, your coworkers and your customers don't care about what you intend to do. They care about what you actually do. Who knows? The courageous step you take today might be a gift to someone who is inspired to take bold action tomorrow.

There is nothing in these seven choices that you intuitively don't already know. At some point in your life, you've acted upon each one of them and experienced the positive consequences.

Imagine what could happen if a critical mass of people in your organization stepped into 2011 making these choices. At least four things would happen: Your department would expand its influence, your organization would become a positive force for change, your employees would live with fewer regrets and the “dead people working syndrome” would give way to a business that's booming.

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