

## What Motivates Our People? How Can We Accommodate Them?

*If we want to benefit from the natural leadership skills of more than half of our population – women – we must make changes to the expectations we set in our cultures. And this is not only important for women, it also matters for an increasing number of men.*

*Making culture changes will also matter greatly to the internet(i)-generation, who are now entering the workforce. They communicate continuously via their smart phones and tablets.*

*I asked Lisa Loehr, an exceptionally accomplished and thoughtful human resource consultant, to write about her ideas for a work environment that will create a high energy and highly motivated culture, since such a culture leads to outstanding sustainable results.*

Work/life balance is a significant issue that usually centers on women with children. While most women applaud employers for family-centric programs, there are many men and women who approach management wondering why more isn't being done to create enhanced flexibility for all workers. Indeed, an unintended consequence of implementing family-specific programs is the resentment from male and female colleagues who do not benefit from these programs because they are not affected by child-related issues. Paradoxically, employers are also challenged by data that seems to indicate that female-sensitive programs are not improving retention or advancement for this demographic.

A strong school of research indicates that employers are playing small ball when it comes to addressing women-centric work/life balance issues. In fact, recent research seems to imply that employers should elevate their game and focus more on employee motivation, and think less on gender. Career analyst Daniel Pink, in his book *Drive*, highlights three factors that are scientifically proven to motivate, but are generally ignored by business leaders. Those factors are:

- Autonomy: that people feel an urge to direct their own lives.
- Mastery: that people feel driven to get better at something that matters
- Purpose: that people feel an innate need to be part of something larger than themselves

Creating a flexible work environment aligns directly with autonomy – and is something valued by both women and men. Studies have shown that offering increased autonomy retains workers because employees feel they have more

professional choices to impact their current situation - they stay and change from within rather than acting on the natural impulse to leave. At the same time, creating autonomy allows employees the flexibility they need to manage their personal life.

Organizations can create autonomous situations and address specific gender needs with minimal cost through a variety of programs that modify the organization's structure or mindset. Here are examples:

- Create broader position titles that allow for wider role definition (or eliminate titles in small businesses)
- Encourage staff to take on work that is outside their comfort zone (ignore strict performance or promotion cycles)
- Allow "job-sharing" (two people coordinate the responsibilities of one by working part-time)
- Build in a percentage of time within the organization for creative problem solving (for example, this can be an annual event or a monthly event – employees then report out to their departments on new ideas)
- Implement a telecommuting policy that enables staff to work from home as much as possible/reasonable
- Consider an "alumni program" – engage employees who have left the organization on a part-time contractual basis for short-term projects (allows staff to care for children, parents, or deal with relocation while providing an "on-ramp" when they are ready to return full-time)

Another way to create greater work flexibility is to provide and promote the use of technology. While Generation Y is firmly rooted in the workplace, Generation Z (fondly known as the iGeneration, or Internet Generation) is just entering the workforce. This group has not known life without the World Wide Web and is comfortable on multiple devices – not just a home or work computer – and tends to communicate more through IM'ing, texting, or video (especially Face Time, Skype, or ooVoo). Considering the power of smart devices and tablets, iGen'ers know that work can be accomplished anywhere and anytime. Organizations that embrace technology may choose to implement a ROWE – Results Only Work Environment – where there is no set work schedule, instead relying on a model where the expectation is that deliverables are met on time.

By making the investment in mobile devices and policies that enable staff to accomplish work in this manner, organizations have the potential to achieve the ultimate in building an autonomous workforce. While there are valid reasons to focus on women in the workplace, I suggest your organization consider a shift to motivation-based solutions that are gender neutral. By serving the entire workforce, you promote greater retention and improved performance while inherently addressing

work/life issues that impact all staff. View Daniel Pink's video about autonomy:  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_pink\\_on\\_motivation.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation.html)

## About The Author



Lisa Loehr is an Organization Consultant, Leadership Coach, and the President of Loehr Collaborative - Lisa has over 20 years experience delivering people-centered programs and processes. Her work is based in San Antonio and Chicago, with virtual services nationwide. Pose questions and connect with Lisa on LinkedIn at: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/lisaloehr>

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