



Seven
basic
LAWS



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*The home truth:
There is no substitute for leadership!*

Introduction

How do you get people to do what needs to be done? Surely this is one of the major challenges facing managers and leaders. Especially in today's labour environment where the magic recipe of American business is not an option.

Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve once replied to a question on the secret for the phenomenal economic success of the United States with the following remark: 'Only two words, "You're fired!"'

It is of course questionable whether even such a threat will, if used exclusively, in the long run get the kind of commitment that you want. The modern knowledge economies demand more than compliance. We need accountability and initiative.

These then are the two key issues at stake:

- ◆ 'How can we motivate when persuasion and not authoritarian command is the tool at our disposal?'

- ◆ ‘How can we motivate so that we get inner commitment and not mere outward compliance?’

These questions touch more than our relationships with those that report to us in the workplace.

They are as important at home in our relationships with our children (How do you motivate a teenager?!) and in relation to ourselves. How do we motivate ourselves, keeping our new year’s resolutions, lose weight, exercise and reach our life’s goals?

In the following booklet it is back to basics, the very basics. And we cut through the cosy cotton wool of fads and fashion to the (sometimes) unpalatable truth.

Please read on...

Law #1

You can only motivate people for something they want to do

The truth of the first law screams to heaven. Ignore it at your own peril. It is the root of endless frustration in our homes and in our offices.

Let me give you an illustration. We all know how difficult it is to motivate a teenager to do chores at home. A couple of years ago, to be precise in 1999, on the eve of the cricket and rugby world cup competitions, I decided that I wanted satellite TV to get full coverage of the events. I remember calling my teenage son on my cell phone from the car: 'Please get me all the details of where and when. I want a dish installed today. Within ten minutes a chirpy voice came back over the phone with detailed instructions on what, where and when. Everything organized to perfection! Imagine if I had asked him to fix the leaking tap?! He had a vested interest in getting the satellite dish. By the

way have you ever had trouble in getting a kid to learn how to operate a VCR?

The art and science of motivation is all about managing around our dislikes and focusing on that which drives us.

Unfortunately life is such that we must often do boring, unpleasant routines to achieve success. To gain numeric skills we must learn our multiplication tables; we must learn by rote our formulae; to learn a new language we must parrot-wise learn the new vocabulary and the conjugation of the verbs.

The art of motivation is to show people the connection between their inner desires and the present task or action that we want them to execute.

 **Take note:**

The first law emphasizes the importance of appointing the right people for the right task. You can't make people do what they don't want to do. If people don't fit their job descriptions try to move

them to positions where they do fit. You can't fundamentally change people.

☛ **Tip #1**

Put your people through a process to develop their own individual mission statements. Use the exercise to understand what drives them.

Law #2:

Only a minority will ever be truly, energetically committed

Forget all the hype. You will never get a hundred percent commitment from each and everyone. We know today that motivation is closely dependent on certain chemicals released in the brain. Some people are born with stronger levels of motivation and commitment.

The only teams in which *en masse* energetic commitment are realized, are top class creative or sports teams working for a great cause in which they fervently believe, such as the Los Alamos that built the first atomic bomb, the original team under Steve Jobs at Apple or a great soccer team such as Manchester United.

These teams comprise hugely gifted people with super egos. They fall in the top segment of

Maslow's famous pyramid of human motivation. They are all self-actualizes. They want to make a mark in life.

Unfortunately, as Maslow's research indicated, only some four percent of the population fall into the category of self-actualizes.

Large corporations cannot only appoint self-actualizes. There are not enough of them to get around. In any case it would be far too expensive.

The majority of people want to do their job, they will do it conscientiously, but in the evenings they want to go home and forget about work. Their real life is not at work, but at home.

The art of management and of leadership is to stretch this majority of people as far as possible; to defend as much as possible against them sliding back into listless apathy. It is the small, incremental advantages that you create in this arena with which you leverage a competitive advantage.

 **Take note**

You are in deep trouble if the self-actualizes in your workforce become de-motivated. They are the key to your success. What do you do to inspire your people?

 **Tip #2**

You need to give people continuous injections of energy. You must continuously invent new campaigns, service drives, and fun happenings to defend against apathy. Learn from an enterprise such as Wal-Mart with their ‘rah-rah’ activities.

Law #3:

People need meaning to keep going

What kept seemingly frail people alive in the harsh conditions of World War II concentration camps, while apparently robust, healthy individuals succumbed and died?

This is the question that intrigued the psychologist Victor Frankl who himself was an inmate of one of these death camps.

Frankl's answer became the basis for his psychological system that prevails to this day: Those who could find meaning in life, survived. Those without some greater goal that gave meaning to their lives, succumbed.

Take note

‘Vision’ and ‘mission’ statements should function as guidelines to what the meaning of the enterprise is. This is where you explain to your employees and colleagues the meaning of your work.

Tip #3

Pay careful attention to your vision and mission statements, whether it be for an enterprise or a project. Avoid complicated legalese in your formulations. Strive for clarity. Give people explicit, clear reasons that they can relate to.

Law #4:

People can endure almost anything if they know there is a time limit to what they have to endure

Give time limits whenever you can. Specify clearly how long disruptive interventions, such as the implementation of large IT projects will take.

There is the beautiful story of the Spanish king, Charles V who, in the seventeenth century decided that he should limit the use of torture in his realm. At the time torture was an accepted instrument to get confessions from suspects.

Now, Charles V had no intention of abolishing torture (that was unthinkable at the time!). Charles V simply felt that as a Christian ruler he had somehow to humanize torture! The result was one

of the great experiments of all time in human motivation.

Charles ordered his torturers to limit their torturing to the time it took to recite a specific number of 'Hail Mary's, or 'Our Fathers', both traditional Christian prayers.

The result was dismal failure. The more sadistic of the torturers recited the prayers at a snails pace to prolong the suffering of their poor victims.

Charles then realized that he should set objective limits to the process, so all the torturers were issued with egg timers and a specific time set.

After a while the torturers came back to the king with a request. They asked for permission to put the egg timers out of sight of the victims. The reason?

They found that when the victims could see the egg timer, in other words when they could see how much time remained, they were able to hold out much better against the torture than when they had no idea how much time had passed!

People will remain committed much longer and with much more willpower if you set the mileposts clearly and explicitly.

 **Take note**

The worst that you can do in keeping people's commitment is to move the goal posts continuously.

 **Tip #4**

Clearly set out a roster of activities with deadlines. Avoid open-ended timelines.

Law #5:

We are more easily motivated by the fear of loss than by the promise of reward

I imagine you have to choose between the following two final lines for your direct marketing letter:

1. “Remember, return your reply today and win the holiday of a life time!”
2. “Remember, return your reply today and don’t lose out on the holiday of a lifetime!”

Research has shown that the second option outperforms the first significantly. Why? People are more likely to be motivated by the fear of loss than by the promise of rewards. In the old argument between using the stick and the carrot to get the donkey going, it is clearly the stick which is more powerful.

Numerous research studies have proven that a negative slant works more powerfully in motivating customers to react than do positive exhortations. Consider the shining example of Robert Ringer's headline for Douglas Casey's book, *Crisis Investing*: "Why you will lose everything in the coming depression". The book spent fifteen weeks on the *New York Times*' bestseller list.

But haven't we all been brought up on the idea that you must be positive? Where does this leave optimism? And where do these "new" ideas come from?

Last first. Over the past twenty years or so a new branch of psychology, called the "psychology of financial behaviour" has enriched our understanding of how people are persuaded, so much so that we can now begin to talk of the science of persuasion. It has already revolutionized the way in which people look at investments. Last year the prestigious science magazine, *Scientific American* even ran a leading article with the title "The science of persuasion". Next time, maybe, I will tell you some more of

the interesting insights that this research has given us into the behaviour of our clients.

The key insight is that people are not necessarily risk averse, but they are most definitely loss averse and will do almost anything to avoid loss. The fear of loss is the most powerful motivator.

This insight is supported by another, independent body of research. Daniel Kahneman received the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002. He found that confronting people with the possibility of loss is twice as powerful as the promise of reward.

But it still leaves us with the question: “What about optimism and a positive attitude?”

We are most persuasive when we convey to people optimism about avoiding loss. Think of something like this: “Even if everybody around you might be suffering fearful losses, you will have that one in a million chance of avoiding loss!”

 **Take note**

Do your people clearly understand what everybody may lose if commitment fails?

☛ **Tip #5**

Clearly describe your outcomes in a loss-benefit format.

 **Take note**

The truth in law #5 is the reason why incentive schemes must continuously be revised. People soon get tired of the same incentives and then even the most seductive incentive becomes a de-motivating factor in the long run.

☛ **Tip #6**

Take a close look at your incentive scheme. When last was it overhauled?

Take note

Our fear of losing is also the reason why you gain commitment by painting yourself into a corner. Think of the following example: Declare openly that you have strong will power and when you say something you do it. You now declare that you will stop smoking. You have made the cost of not keeping your resolution so high that you cannot afford to go back on your word.

Tip #7

How can you make the thought of not achieving your goals as unacceptable as possible?

Take note

The truth behind Law#5 leads us to another important insight. Get small commitments from you people. There are two benefits: (1) small commitments mean small initial sacrifices ('Give me half an hour of your time once a week...'); (2) Having once given a small commitment, people are unwilling to lose the investment they made project and are more prone to sustain commitment.

☛ **Tip #8**

Define short-term commitments in such a way that you cannot but succeed.

Law #6:

Tell, don't beg!

THe proper use of authority is one of the greatest challenges in the process of motivation.

I love the following story that has its origins in the Anglo American Corporation.

A young, up and coming manager asked advice from one of Anglo's elder statesman on how to gain commitment for a program.

The elder statesman gave the following reply: 'James (a fictional name), you are too young to remember, but in the 1980s SABC TV ran a program by a British woman, Barbara Woodhouse on how to train your dog.

'Now, James' continued the elder statesman, 'do you know what the secret of her success was? Her advice was: "Don't beg the dog, tell the dog." Let me tell you James, in the one hundred

year history of Anglo America things only happened when we told people, not when we begged them!’

Don’t confuse this statement with authoritarianism. In actual fact this advice is based on a foundation of deep respect for the individual worker’s sense of responsibility. Most people have an innate sense of responsibility. Most people welcome sensible authority. When you state an objective as a matter of fact people will obey without resentment.

Take note

There is no substitute for leadership. You cannot hide behind the concept of consultative management to escape the burden of leadership!

Tip #8

The key to ‘the ‘tell’ ‘don’t beg approach is that communication the leader should express the communication devoid of all emotion. Factuality is the success recipe. We are not referring to the body of communication, but to a single command sentence that launches a project, for

example the Financial Director of a large corporation sending the following email at the beginning of a new IT project: ‘Dear Financial Officers, You will know that we have been planning a new reporting system for some months now. We are now at the point of inauguration. Please note that I expect all Financial Officers to use the new system when reporting from the following date....Thank you. Financial Director.’

Law #7:

Habit, habit, habit!

We are all creatures of habit.

The recipe for long-term commitment is:

- ◆ You persuade people to make a small sacrifice by
- ◆ Showing how serious the loss will be if the course of action is not undertaken at the same time
- ◆ You exude optimism that the threat can be overcome and
- ◆ Inspire with meaning
- ◆ Once having secured initial commitment to take a small step you must accumulate numerous of these small sacrifices into a habit
- ◆ We are all creatures of habit. Once when our individual failing willpower has been superseded by habit, continuous commitment becomes a possibility.

Take note

Even an activity which initially was unpleasant to do (like going to gym), after having become a habit, becomes difficult to break. In short, in the end you would rather go to gym than not go.

Tip #9

Scrutinise your business for opportunities to turn into habits.

Action

You should now understand the basic building blocks of motivation

Use this tick list to check to evaluate your motivational leadership on your current project.

	YES
1 I know which values drive my people individually. I have run a systematic program to understand what motivates them individually.	
2 I have had two different drives during the past two years to energize and inspire my people	
3 Everybody knows exactly where we fit into the bigger picture. We have a clear, explicit statement expressing why we do what we do that we can hand to newcomers	
4 We have a clear set of deadlines and we keep to them	
5 Everybody knows exactly what we stand to lose if we fail	
6 I am convinced that I always, without fail, communicate optimism and enthusiasm	

7 I have overhauled my incentive scheme at the end of the previous financial year	
8 I make a point of defining commitment in terms of small sacrifices	
9 I am not afraid to commit myself publicly in such a way that I cannot afford to fail	
10 I can count at least 5 habits that lead to continuous commitment in my team	



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He writes on media events and marketing trends for *Rapport* newspaper and is the author of the *Official 1998 Year of Science and Technology Calendar* as well as being a published essayist.

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