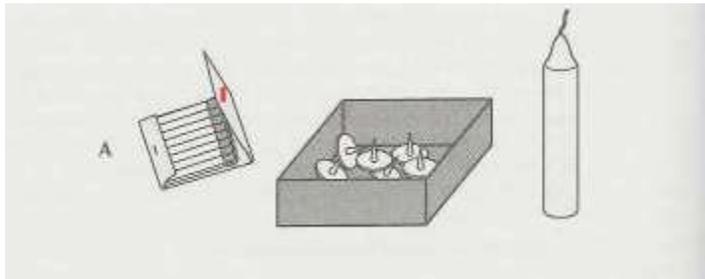


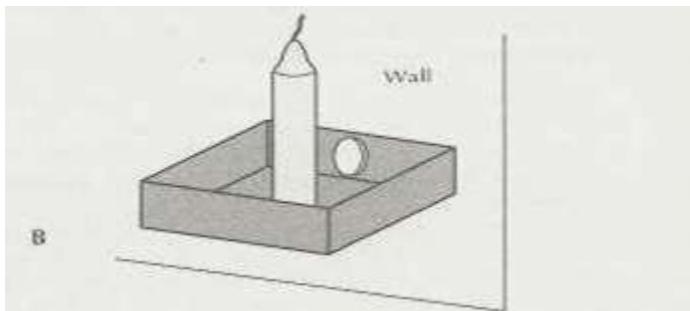
A Candle, A Box of Thumbtacks, and A Matchbook

What do a candle, a box of thumbtacks, and a matchbook have to do with motivation?

Let's try an experiment. Suppose I bring you into a room and give you the following items: A candle, a matchbook, and a box of thumbtacks (see A below).



Then I said to you: "Your job is to attach the candle to the wall so that the candle doesn't drip wax on the floor as it burns. Most people would try something like melting the side of the candle so that it would stick to the wall—that won't work. Some would try to "pin" the candle to the wall—that won't work either, though it's a pretty good idea. Some of us might eventually give up, calling the experiment "silly." But most of us with a sufficient amount of time would figure out the solution. It looks something like (see figure below):



Now, let's try the experiment* with two new groups of people, Group 1 and Group 2. To Group 1, I say, "Your job is to attach the candle to the wall so that the candle doesn't drip wax on the floor as it burns. And, I'm going to time you to pre-established norms for solving the problem. If you finish within the top 25% of established times I'll pay you \$50. If you finish within the top 50% of established times I'll pay you \$25. To Group 2, I say the same thing, *except* there is no offer of rewards.

Which group would you think would correctly solve the problem faster? Most people would think Group 1 would solve it faster. Wrong! This actual experiment was conducted and repeated over and over again with similar results: **The group with no monetary rewards offered to it solved the problem on average three and a half minutes faster than the group with the promise of rewards.** Why?

What we've learned is that when tangible rewards like money are offered for work, or effort, or results, they serve as distractions—people's attention is drawn away from the problem to be solved or the task to be performed and toward the reward itself. They lose focus on the task. Their minds become overly occupied with the reward.

This finding flies in the face of what business has come to believe as the way things are done: *If you do this, you get that.* The *This* is a task, a result, something than can best be called *work*. The *That* is a reward, something tangible, like money, candy bars, vacations, free trips, bonuses, the corner office. Somehow, somewhere along the way, we've gotten this whole concept of motivation terribly wrong.

What's emerged from experiments like this is a new way of thinking about what motivates people and it has everything to do with getting them interested, even excited by the work itself. Imagine what can be possible when people are valued for the work they produce, believe it's important and meaningful, and celebrate when they've achieved breakthroughs. The possibilities are endless.

What can leaders do about this?

- Create meaningful, important work for your followers whenever possible. Connect the dots for them to make sure they see why what they're doing is important.
- Encourage them to think. Even the most inexperienced people have something to contribute if they're involved. Note: See this month's recommended selection: "Moneyball." Peter Brand, one of the brains behind the Oakland A's phenomenal success as a baseball team was a 22-year-old economist who never played baseball.
- Communicate to your followers just how important they are to the organization's success. This can't happen too frequently.

*This experiment, created by a researcher named Sam Glucksberg at Princeton, has been repeated with consistent results for decades.