Motivating the Clinical Instructor

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ATHLETIC TRAINING EDUCATORS and administrators face numerous challenges, one of which is motivating people. Instilling in others a “desire to achieve a goal, combined with the energy to work toward the goal” is not easy. Understanding motivation is important, because the success or failure of an organization often depends on the motivation levels of the people in the organization. The purpose of this report is to review motivation theory and to provide a framework for understanding how motivation influences behavior.

Consider a story about Mike, who is the only certified athletic trainer (ATC) at a large urban high school in the Midwest. Mike loves his job and does it well. He recently expressed an interest in serving as an Approved Clinical Instructor (ACI) for the local Athletic Training Education Program (ATEP). Initially, Mike was thrilled about the possibility of becoming an ACI. However, his enthusiasm quickly waned after realizing that completion of clinical proficiency evaluation forms required a considerable amount of time and energy, and he felt pressured to complete the forms in a timely manner. Moreover, the daunting task of performing ACI duties suddenly prevented him from providing care for his student-athletes, the primary responsibility of his position at the high school. Additionally, he had recently started taking graduate courses necessary to pursue a future role as a school administrator, which was demanding much of his personal and professional time. Mike quickly became apathetic about his ACI role. He was unmotivated (Figure 1).

Mike’s case is not atypical. Instilling motivation can be challenging, and sustaining motivation can be even more difficult. Strategies to increase motivation range from fear-inducing threats and tough-love tactics to non-coercive actions that appeal to a person’s moral values and sense of self. Fast forward several weeks in the story about Mike. Upon learning about his frustrations, the ATEP administrator took immediate action by scheduling a meeting at Mike’s convenience to identify and address Mike’s needs. In other words, what could be done to inspire Mike? As a result of quick intervention and acknowledgment of his concerns, Mike and

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**Key Points**

- Supportive environments enhance intrinsic motivation.
- Athletic Training administrators play an important role in identifying staff needs.
- Intrinsic motivation promotes productivity and creativity.
the ATEP administrator determined that they would need to develop an alternative method for evaluating the students assigned to him.

After the meeting, Mike recognized that he could incorporate the new evaluation system into his daily routine without comprising the amount of time devoted to providing high-quality athletic training services. He was motivated to teach again in the clinical setting, and to do it well (Figure 2). Granted, not all situations such as Mike’s are effectively resolved; however, failure to recognize the important role that leaders play in identifying, understanding, and assisting individuals in finding a means to have staff needs met is often a barrier to motivation. The motivation of ACIs, or students or employees, cannot be achieved through a “one-size fits all” approach. What works with one person may not work with the next. Viewing people as individuals is an important step in the process.

**Multi-Dimensional Perspectives of Motivation**

Numerous theories have been developed to explain human motivation. One of the more popular theories is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that individuals aim to satisfy physical needs, and self-esteem needs to attain self-actualization. Maslow’s theory lacks an evidence base to support this contention, but efforts to develop such a unified theory that can be applied to multiple situations continue.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is an evidence-based approach to understanding motivation that involves a concept that is somewhat analogous to Maslow’s theory, i.e., individuals pursue activities to satisfy their basic psychological needs. SDT is not concerned with what causes intrinsic motivation, but rather what maintains intrinsic motivation. According to SDT, there are three main psychological needs that are the basis for sustaining motivation: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness, each of which are essential for self-motivation and personal well-being. When these three needs are met, an individual is considered to be self-determined, i.e., not tethered by the demands or wishes of others, but free to pursue one’s own interest. Unlike Maslow’s theory, there is no