

# IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

Trying to motivate staff with old-school carrot-on-a-stick incentives simply doesn't work. According to a study by author Daniel Pink in *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, bonus commissions can actually incentivize poor performance. I can't say I disagree. Bonus commissions cause friction in team settings, where sales staff depend on one another's cooperation and support. If salespeople stop getting extra remuneration, they can also become lethargic. And "What's in this for me?" is a poor attitude to have while helping customers with their big-picture needs.

Pink's premise, based on some compelling studies, is that workers need to make enough to live on, but once rewards are based on additional incentives, they can actually be counterproductive. Have you seen staff fight over commissions? Ignore basic responsibilities in a selfish pursuit of extra money? Blow a sale because commission addiction prompted them to oversell to an apprehensive customer?

Me, too.



### AUTONOMY

Pink exposes three motivators that are greater than monetary enticement: *autonomy*, *mastery* and *purpose*. The first, *autonomy*, is an often unrecognized compulsion that offers powerful self-drive. This concept holds that employees need to "own" a part of the operation, be it a simple store-improvement task, elements of a marketing drive or a protocol decision.

Do your employees believe they have a say in setting policies that better serve your customers? After all, they're the ones in the trenches, and they'll know firsthand when a policy can conflict with customers'

best interests. Do employees get to suggest product display efficiencies? Sometimes, a little uninhibited creativity can give your showroom pizzazz. We had a "Good Housekeeping" promotion for instrument care accessories, and one staff member suggested dangling mops and cleaning supplies from fishing line above the shelves. He and others are now empowered to suggest outlandish but effective display ideas.

We have regular meetings on what's working and what's hampering our instrument rental program. I can't tell you the number of powerful tweaks our people have come up with to make the program more efficient and customer-friendly. Again, they're the ones in battle.

### MASTERY

*Mastery* should be an easy one for music store employees to understand. From the day they started on their first instruments, the drive to get better made them dig from within. These people know firsthand the rewards of practice and perfecting performance skills, and it should be no different on your sales floor.

When you hire right, you

get people who *want* to be good at their jobs, and that sense of personal satisfaction is a massive motivational force. How many of them play in bands or situations where they work nearly for free but can't wait to leave work to get to the gig? It's not about money. It's about doing something well — and for fun. Their work life should have the same goals.

### PURPOSE

*Purpose* is the third motivator, and the world is full of examples. Look at Wikipedia, and compare it to Microsoft's failed Encarta encyclopedia. Who would have thought that, after a decade of huge financial investment in the latter, the world's most popular research body would've been done with volunteer labor? Humans have a strong drive for meaning and to leave a mark on the world. Staff who believe they're creating musicians through your store have a good reason to get out of bed in the morning.

It's not just about the wage. It's about significance. **MI**

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