14 Management Do’s And Don’ts To Motivate Employees By Shedd

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David Shedd’s article “14 Management Do’s and Don’ts to Motivate Employees” presents practical guidance for managers who want to improve trust, engagement, accountability, and performance. The original essay correctly observes that employees judge leaders not only by formal decisions but also by everyday behavior. A manager’s mood, clarity, honesty, responsiveness, and willingness to accept responsibility influence whether employees feel safe enough to ask questions, report problems, and contribute ideas. Motivation cannot be created through slogans while managers behave unpredictably or disrespectfully. The fourteen recommendations are therefore best understood as a guide to the daily relationships through which organizational culture is built. (Shedd, 2010)

The advice remains useful because employees usually experience an organization through their immediate supervisor. Senior executives may publish values concerning teamwork and integrity, but a manager who becomes angry, ignores messages, breaks promises, or blames others teaches a different set of values. Positive management does not mean avoiding standards or difficult conversations. It means communicating expectations clearly, investigating fairly, correcting privately where appropriate, recognizing contribution, and treating employees as responsible adults. Each of Shedd’s recommendations addresses a behavior that can either strengthen or weaken that relationship. (Shedd, 2010)

1. Do Not Manage Through Anger

Shedd’s first recommendation is that managers should not become angry in ways that intimidate employees or distort decisions. Anger is a normal emotion, and leaders do not need to pretend that serious errors or misconduct have no effect. The problem is uncontrolled expression: shouting, insults, threats, public humiliation, or decisions made before facts are known. Employees who fear an angry response may hide mistakes, delay bad news, and avoid asking for help. The manager then receives less accurate information and may believe that silence proves the workplace is functioning well. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Managing anger requires a deliberate process. A supervisor can pause, gather information, separate the behavior from the person, and schedule a conversation when both sides can think clearly. The discussion should identify what happened, why it matters, what standard applies, and what must change. Serious conduct may require formal discipline, but discipline should follow policy and evidence rather than emotional release. Calmness is not weakness; it allows the manager to preserve authority without making fear the main form of control. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

2. Do Not Be Unfriendly

The second point is that managers should not be unfriendly or emotionally unavailable. Employees often judge leaders through observable mood because they cannot see private intention. A manager may believe that silence shows concentration, while employees interpret it as disapproval or hostility. Simple behaviors such as greeting people, acknowledging questions, maintaining respectful tone, and showing interest in work can make communication easier. Friendliness does not require becoming every employee's close friend or removing professional boundaries. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Workers need access to managers during both successful and difficult periods. If the supervisor is approachable only when results are good, employees will avoid discussing risks until they become crises. A friendly professional relationship supports psychological safety: people can raise concerns, admit uncertainty, and suggest improvements without expecting ridicule. The manager should remain consistent so that access does not depend entirely on personal mood. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

3. Do Not Send Ambiguous Messages

Shedd advises managers to avoid confusing or contradictory communication. Employees cannot perform reliably when priorities are unclear, instructions change without explanation, or different people receive different versions of the same decision. Ambiguity can also arise when a manager says that quality is the priority but rewards only speed, or claims that questions are welcome while reacting impatiently to them. Workers learn from incentives and behavior as much as from official statements. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Clear communication identifies the expected outcome, deadline, responsibility, available resources, constraints, and method of follow-up. The manager should invite questions and ask the employee to explain the task in their own words when misunderstanding would create serious risk. Written confirmation is useful for complex assignments, but it should not become an excuse for excessive bureaucracy. When priorities change, the supervisor should explain what changed and which previous work is no longer required. Clarity saves time because employees do not have to guess what the manager intended. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

4. Do Not Fake Honesty or Enthusiasm

The fourth recommendation is to avoid faking feelings, promises, or knowledge. Employees usually recognize when a leader praises work without sincerity, claims certainty without evidence, or pretends to support a decision that is privately criticized. This inconsistency reduces trust because workers begin interpreting every message as political performance. A manager does not need to disclose every private concern, but communication should remain truthful. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Honesty includes admitting when information is incomplete. Saying “I do not know yet, but I will check” is more credible than inventing an answer. It also includes avoiding promises about promotions, bonuses, schedules, or organizational changes that the manager cannot control. If confidentiality prevents full disclosure, the leader can state that limitation directly. Authenticity is not the same as sharing every emotion; it is alignment between what the manager says, what the manager knows, and what the manager is authorized to do. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

5. Do Not Be Egocentric

Shedd’s fifth point warns managers against focusing only on personal welfare, credit, status, or convenience. Leadership is a relational role. A manager who claims every success, shifts undesirable work downward, and makes decisions only to impress senior executives weakens teamwork. Employees may still comply, but they will protect their own interests rather than contribute openly to shared goals. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

A less egocentric manager recognizes the work of others, considers the effect of deadlines on the team, shares information, and accepts that expertise may exist at lower organizational levels. This does not mean avoiding personal ambition. A leader can pursue career development while creating opportunities for employees. In fact, a team’s sustained performance is stronger evidence of management capability than one person’s constant self-promotion. The manager should ask not only “How does this make me look?” but also “What does the team need to succeed responsibly?” (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

6. Do Not Disown Your Actions

The sixth recommendation concerns accountability. Managers should not deny decisions, blame unnamed senior leaders, or present their own mistake as an employee’s failure. Workers observe whether authority and responsibility remain connected. If leaders receive credit for success but disappear when outcomes are poor, employees learn to protect themselves through documentation, silence, and blame shifting. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Accepting responsibility does not require taking blame for everything that occurs. A manager should distinguish personal decisions, team errors, system failures, and external events. The important practice is to acknowledge the part under the manager’s control. A statement such as “I approved the timeline without confirming capacity, so I will correct the plan” demonstrates accountability while still examining other factors. This behavior encourages employees to report mistakes earlier because they see that error can lead to learning rather than automatic scapegoating. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

7. Do Not Jump to Conclusions

Shedd advises leaders to investigate before deciding why something happened. A missed deadline may result from carelessness, but it may also reflect unclear instructions, unavailable data, equipment failure, conflicting priorities, illness, or dependence on another department. A manager who assumes laziness or disloyalty before listening can punish the wrong person and leave the real cause unchanged. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Fair investigation begins with facts: what was expected, what occurred, when the problem became known, which resources were available, and what the employee did in response. The supervisor should ask open questions before presenting an accusation. Evidence should be compared with policy and previous cases. Speed matters when safety or misconduct is involved, but speed should not eliminate fairness. Employees are more likely to accept an unfavorable decision when they believe the process was consistent and their explanation was genuinely considered. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

8. Do Not Break Promises

The eighth point is that managers should honor commitments. Promises about feedback, schedules, resources, development, leave, or recognition shape employee expectations. When a leader repeatedly fails to deliver without explanation, workers stop treating future statements as reliable. Motivation declines because employees cannot connect effort with the outcomes they were told to expect. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Managers should make fewer and more realistic commitments. When circumstances prevent completion, they should communicate before the deadline, explain what changed, and provide a revised plan. A promise should not be treated as casual encouragement. If the manager lacks authority to guarantee an outcome, the statement should be framed accurately as an intention, recommendation, or request. Reliability is built through repeated small actions as much as major decisions. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

9. Be Responsive

Shedd recommends that managers respond when employees seek help, decisions, or clarification. Delayed response can prevent work from proceeding and communicate that the employee’s problem is unimportant. Responsiveness does not require solving every issue immediately. It can begin with acknowledgement, a timeframe, and identification of the person responsible. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Boundaries remain necessary. A manager who is interrupted constantly may have no time for planning or focused work, and employees may develop unrealistic expectations. Teams can establish channels for emergencies, routine decisions, and nonurgent questions. Delegation is also appropriate when another person has the authority and knowledge to respond. The key is that requests should not disappear because the manager is busy or uncomfortable with the issue. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

10. Support Employees Publicly

The tenth recommendation is to support employees in public and resolve differences privately where possible. A manager should not undermine a team member in front of customers, colleagues, or senior leaders merely to protect personal reputation. Public contradiction can damage the employee's credibility and create fear across the team. If an immediate correction is necessary for safety, ethics, or accuracy, it should be made respectfully and without humiliation. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

Public support does not mean concealing wrongdoing or defending an employee regardless of evidence. It means giving the employee fair representation and avoiding unnecessary exposure. A manager can say that the issue will be reviewed and then investigate privately. When the employee acted correctly, the supervisor should make that clear. When correction is required, the conversation should focus on behavior and expectations. Teams become more willing to take responsible initiative when they know their manager will not abandon them at the first difficulty. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

11. Do Not Blame Employees for Every Failure

The original essay includes the important warning that supervisors should not blame their subjects automatically when results are poor. Performance problems can arise from staffing, training, workflow, incentives, technology, unrealistic targets, unclear authority, or management decisions. Blaming the nearest employee may create a simple explanation but prevents organizational learning. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

A useful review distinguishes individual accountability from system accountability. If an employee knowingly ignored a clear safety rule, personal consequences may be necessary. If several competent employees make the same error, the process may be poorly designed. Managers should examine whether the task was possible under the available conditions and whether earlier warning signs were ignored. A fair organization can hold individuals accountable while also correcting the environment that shaped the result. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

12. Acknowledge Successful Work

Shedd advises managers to recognize employees for tasks completed successfully. Recognition confirms that effort and contribution are visible. It can be verbal, written, financial, developmental, or public, depending on the achievement and employee preference. Specific recognition is stronger than a generic statement. Explaining what the employee did and why it mattered connects praise with organizational goals. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

Recognition should be distributed fairly. Managers may notice highly visible employees while overlooking quieter work that prevents problems or supports others. They should also avoid praising one person for a team result or assuming that every employee wants public attention. Recognition becomes demotivating when it is inconsistent, political, or used instead of adequate pay and opportunity. It works best as one part of a fair employment relationship. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

13. Give Credit and Development Opportunities

The original discussion of acknowledging teams can be extended into the responsibility to give accurate credit. Managers often present employee ideas to senior leadership, compile reports, or represent team achievements. They should identify the people who generated the work and create opportunities for employees to present directly when appropriate. Credit supports professional reputation and advancement, not merely temporary satisfaction. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

Development is another form of recognition. A manager can assign a challenging project, provide training, sponsor an employee for a role, or give constructive feedback. These actions communicate that the person has a future within the organization. Development should be based on interest and readiness rather than used as extra work without support. Employees are more motivated when they can see how current effort builds competence and opportunity. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

14. Be a Good Listener

The final recommendation is to listen when employees provide views. Listening requires more than remaining silent until it is time to reply. The manager should understand the concern, ask questions, and distinguish facts, emotions, and proposed solutions. Employees closest to the work may identify customer problems, safety risks, waste, or process failures before management data reveal them. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Good listening does not require agreeing with every request. The manager can reject a proposal while explaining the reasoning and showing that it was considered. Employees become cynical when leaders invite feedback and then provide no response. Closing the loop is therefore essential: the team should know what was learned, what will change, and what cannot change. Listening creates motivation when employees see a connection between voice and action. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Why the Fourteen Tips Are Not Sufficient Alone

The original essay correctly argues that Shedd's recommendations are useful but not sufficient for overall workforce performance. Respectful management cannot compensate for poor job design, inadequate staffing, unsafe conditions, unfair pay, or missing training. An employee may have a friendly and responsive manager yet remain demotivated because the role is incompatible with skills or because advancement is impossible. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

Organizations should place employees in roles that match capability and provide adequate training. Role clarity helps people understand how their work contributes to larger objectives. Training should address technical skills, communication, safety, and changes in systems. Resources and authority must match expectations; motivation declines when people are held responsible for outcomes they cannot influence. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

Managing Anger in Practice

The original critique asks Shedd to explain how supervisors can manage anger. Practical methods include recognizing physical warning signs, delaying nonurgent conversations, separating facts from assumptions, and using structured questions. Managers can prepare for difficult conversations by identifying the standard, evidence, desired correction, and consequences. Coaching or employee-assistance support may be appropriate when anger repeatedly affects relationships. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Organizations also shape anger. Unmanageable workloads, contradictory demands, lack of support, and a culture that celebrates aggressive leadership can make emotional control more difficult. Leaders should address these conditions rather than treating anger only as a personal weakness. Professional conduct remains the manager's responsibility, but prevention includes reasonable systems. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Improving Communication

The original critique also calls for greater explanation of communication. Effective communication uses appropriate channels, timing, language, and feedback. Complex change requires more than one email. Employees may need a meeting, written guidance, examples, and opportunities to practice.

Sensitive feedback should not be delivered through an impersonal message when dialogue is possible. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Managers should also communicate upward and across departments. A supervisor who listens to employees but cannot represent their concerns to senior leadership will have limited effect. Communication is a network, not a one-directional command. The leader's role is to move accurate information through that network while protecting confidentiality and preventing distortion. (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019)

Conclusion

Shedd's fourteen management do's and don'ts remain a practical guide to employee motivation because they focus on behavior employees experience every day. Managers should control anger, remain approachable, communicate clearly, act honestly, avoid egocentrism, accept responsibility, investigate before judging, keep promises, respond to requests, support employees, avoid automatic blame, recognize contribution, give credit, and listen. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

These practices build trust and engagement, but they must be supported by appropriate roles, training, fair pay, manageable work, safe conditions, and genuine development opportunities. Motivation is not a technique performed on employees. It develops when people experience consistency between organizational claims and managerial conduct. A successful manager therefore combines Shedd's interpersonal guidance with systems that allow employees to perform, learn, speak, and receive fair recognition for their work. (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019)

References

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