

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

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David Shedd's "14 Management Do's and Don'ts to Motivate Employees" offers practical guidance for managers who want to strengthen trust, engagement, accountability, and performance. Its value lies in the recognition that employees experience leadership through daily behavior rather than through mission statements alone. A manager's tone, honesty, responsiveness, consistency, willingness to accept responsibility, and treatment of mistakes influence whether employees feel safe enough to ask questions, report problems, and contribute ideas. Motivation cannot be created through slogans if the supervisor is unpredictable, dismissive, or quick to blame. Shedd's fourteen recommendations can therefore be understood not as isolated tips but as a coherent model of credible management. They emphasize emotional control, clear communication, accountability, reliability, employee support, recognition, and listening. These behaviors do not replace fair pay, adequate staffing, training, or good job design, but they shape the climate in which those organizational systems are experienced. Effective motivation emerges when respectful leadership is combined with realistic expectations, resources, opportunities for development, and a workplace where employees believe their effort and voice matter (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019).

Emotional Control, Approachability, and Clear Communication

Several of Shedd's first recommendations concern the emotional climate created by the manager. Leaders should not manage through anger, remain chronically unfriendly, or send ambiguous messages. Anger is a normal emotion, and serious mistakes or misconduct may require firm response, but shouting, insults, threats, public humiliation, or impulsive decisions teach employees to hide information rather than solve problems. Workers who expect an angry reaction may delay reporting errors or avoid asking questions until a situation becomes more serious. A better approach is to pause, gather facts, separate the behavior from the person, and discuss the standard, impact, and required correction in a controlled setting. Approachability matters for the same reason. Employees need to believe they can raise uncertainty, risk, or bad news without being treated as an inconvenience. Friendliness does not require managers to become close personal friends with every employee; it requires predictable respect, basic acknowledgment, and professional availability. Psychological safety grows when employees know they can speak before a problem becomes a crisis (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019).

Clear communication extends beyond tone. Managers should avoid contradictory instructions, unexplained changes in priority, and statements that conflict with actual incentives. If leadership says quality matters but rewards only speed, employees learn from the reward system rather than the slogan. Effective communication identifies the expected result, deadline, responsibility, constraints, available resources, and method of follow-up. Complex tasks may require written confirmation, while sensitive feedback usually requires conversation rather than an impersonal message. Shedd also warns against fake honesty or enthusiasm. Employees often recognize when a leader pretends to know more than they do, offers praise without sincerity, or promises outcomes they cannot control. Saying “I do not know yet, but I will find out” is usually more credible than inventing an answer. Authentic management is not total emotional disclosure; it is reasonable alignment between what the manager says, what the manager knows, and what the manager is actually able to do (Shedd, 2010).

Accountability, Fair Judgment, and Reliability

Shedd’s advice against egocentrism, disowning actions, jumping to conclusions, and breaking promises addresses the credibility of authority. Managers who claim every success, shift undesirable work downward, or make decisions primarily to protect their own reputation weaken teamwork because employees learn that leadership is self-serving. A more credible manager gives accurate credit, considers the effect of decisions on the team, and accepts responsibility for choices within their control. Accountability does not mean taking blame for every event. It means distinguishing personal decisions, employee errors, system failures, and external conditions honestly. A manager who says, “I approved a timeline without confirming capacity, so I will correct the plan,” models the same accountability expected from employees. This reduces defensive behavior because mistakes can be discussed without assuming that the first objective is to identify a scapegoat (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019).

Fair judgment also requires investigation before accusation. A missed deadline may result from poor effort, but it may also reflect unclear instructions, unavailable information, equipment failure, conflicting priorities, illness, or dependence on another department. Managers should establish what was expected, what happened, which resources were available, when the problem became known, and how the employee responded. Serious safety or conduct issues may require fast action, but speed should not eliminate fairness. Reliability is equally important. Promises about schedules, resources, feedback, development, or recognition shape expectations. When managers repeatedly fail to deliver without explanation, employees stop treating future statements as meaningful. Leaders should therefore make fewer and more realistic commitments, communicate early when circumstances change, and distinguish clearly between a guarantee, an intention, and a recommendation. Trust is built through repeated small acts of consistency as much as through major decisions (Shedd, 2010).

Responsiveness, Public Support, and Avoiding a Culture of Blame

Shedd also emphasizes responsiveness and the importance of supporting employees appropriately. A manager who ignores requests for clarification or assistance can block work and communicate that employee concerns do not matter. Responsiveness does not require solving every issue immediately; a useful response may simply acknowledge the request, identify who is responsible, and provide a realistic timeframe. Teams can establish different channels for emergencies, routine approvals, and nonurgent questions so that managers remain accessible without being interrupted constantly. Public support is another important behavior. A supervisor should avoid undermining an employee in front of customers, colleagues, or senior leaders merely to protect personal reputation. Immediate correction may be necessary when safety or accuracy is at risk, but it can still be done respectfully. In most situations, differences are better investigated privately so that accountability does not become humiliation (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019).

Supporting employees does not mean defending every action regardless of evidence. It means ensuring fair representation and avoiding automatic blame. When performance is poor, managers should ask whether the cause lies in individual behavior, staffing, training, workflow, technology, unclear authority, conflicting targets, or management decisions. If several competent employees make the same error, the process may be poorly designed. If one employee knowingly ignores a clear safety rule, personal consequences may be appropriate. A healthy organization can hold individuals accountable while still examining the system that shaped the outcome. This distinction is central to motivation because employees are more willing to report mistakes and risks when they believe the review process will seek the real cause rather than simply punish the person closest to the failure (Edmondson, 2019).

Recognition, Credit, Development, and Employee Voice

The positive side of Shedd's framework includes recognition, accurate credit, development opportunities, and listening. Employees need to know that successful work is noticed and connected with organizational goals. Recognition can be verbal, written, financial, developmental, or public depending on the contribution and the employee's preference. Specific praise is stronger than a generic compliment because it explains what the person did and why it mattered. Recognition should also be distributed fairly. Quiet preventive work, support of colleagues, and reliable routine performance can be overlooked when managers focus only on highly visible achievements. At the same time, praise cannot compensate indefinitely for inadequate pay, unsafe conditions, or lack of advancement. Herzberg's work on motivation helps clarify this distinction: recognition and achievement can support motivation, but employees also require acceptable organizational conditions

and meaningful work (Herzberg, 1968).

Giving credit is particularly important when managers present employee ideas or team results to senior leadership. The people who produced the work should be identified accurately and, when appropriate, given opportunities to present it themselves. Development can reinforce that recognition through training, stretch assignments, mentoring, feedback, and sponsorship for future roles. These opportunities should build capability rather than simply add unpaid work. Shedd's final recommendation—listening—is equally important. Listening involves understanding the concern, asking questions, and responding to what was actually said rather than waiting for a chance to defend a decision. Managers do not have to agree with every suggestion, but they should close the loop by explaining what will change, what cannot change, and why. Employee voice becomes motivating when people can see some connection between speaking up and organizational learning (Shedd, 2010; Edmondson, 2019).

Why Good Management Requires More Than Fourteen Behaviors

Shedd's recommendations are useful because they describe interpersonal behaviors employees encounter every day, but they are not sufficient by themselves to create a high-performing workplace. A friendly, honest, and responsive manager cannot fully compensate for chronic understaffing, unsafe conditions, poor job design, inadequate training, unfair compensation, or impossible targets. Motivation depends partly on whether employees have the resources and authority required to meet expectations. Role clarity, appropriate placement, technical and interpersonal training, reasonable workloads, and opportunities for advancement all influence whether good intentions can translate into performance. Managers also need organizational support. A supervisor who listens carefully but lacks authority to correct recurring system problems will eventually lose credibility if nothing changes. Leadership therefore includes communication upward and across departments, not only downward to direct reports (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968).

The management of anger provides a useful example of this interaction between individual and system responsibility. Leaders can learn to recognize physical warning signs, delay nonurgent conversations, separate assumptions from facts, and prepare structured feedback. Coaching may help when emotional reactions repeatedly affect relationships. Yet organizations also contribute to emotional strain through contradictory demands, excessive workload, unclear accountability, or a culture that rewards aggressive behavior. Professional conduct remains the manager's responsibility, but prevention requires realistic systems. The same principle applies to communication. A manager can improve wording and listening, but employees will remain confused if senior leadership constantly changes priorities without explanation. Sustainable motivation therefore requires alignment between individual managerial behavior and broader organizational design.

Conclusion

Shedd's fourteen management do's and don'ts remain valuable because they focus on the behaviors through which employees experience leadership. Managers should control anger, remain approachable, communicate clearly, act honestly, avoid egocentrism, accept responsibility, investigate before judging, keep promises, respond to requests, support employees fairly, avoid automatic blame, recognize successful work, give credit and development opportunities, and listen seriously to employee views. These practices strengthen trust because they connect authority with respect and accountability. They do not eliminate the need for fair compensation, training, staffing, safe conditions, and well-designed work, but they create the relational foundation on which those systems depend. Motivation is strongest when employees understand expectations, have the resources to meet them, believe that managers will treat them fairly, and see that effort and voice can influence outcomes. Effective management is therefore less about occasional motivational speeches than about consistent behavior repeated across ordinary decisions every day (Shedd, 2010; Herzberg, 1968; Edmondson, 2019).

References

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