



Motivation That's Habit Forming

Read this story aloud or make copies for your group or team members.

99-Word Story

Everyone knows it's tough to quit smoking, but why do people start? Cigarettes have a warning label. In Europe it covers half the pack! What's the motivation to begin an activity that everyone knows will eventually be deadly? No one would drink a household cleaner even though the warning label is less prominent!

Despite the obvious dangers, many people begin smoking to be cool, to be in, to be part of the group. Social belonging is one of the strongest human needs – and it crosses cultures.

Tap into belonging and you can motivate for life!

You can build upon the theme of this 99-Word Story by using some of the following questions for your own reflection or to spark a discussion within your team or organization.

Discussion Questions

- What are some ways you have been motivated to do something because of the influence of your friends?
- Share an example of positive social belonging in the workplace.
- How might the need for social belonging influence decision-making, communication, or problem-solving on a team?
- What social groups do you belong to and what makes you stick to them?

There are many ways to understand this story as the discussion questions suggest. If you or your group would like to compare or

contrast your interpretation with an outside viewpoint, consider this analysis.

Interpretation

Having a sense of belonging is a powerful motivator. It's an internal driver that can propel us to actions and behaviors we may not even have been planning. Do most of us go out to dinner with an expectation to overeat? Probably not, but when other people eat two pieces of cake it suddenly becomes more acceptable for us to do the same.

In some instances, going with the crowd may simply be mindless coasting. But other times, going along to get along, to smooth relationships, to be part of the group is a conscious choice. Until it's brought to our attention, we may not realize how much influence our favorite groups have on what we do. In some work settings, what people wear is decided for them. But where safety is not an issue or uniforms are not needed, people still know what to wear to fit in and how formal to be while at work. Even in a less hierarchical society like the United States, people know to whom they should defer and how they should show respect. And whether it's a fantasy sports group, volunteers supporting the homeless, or a garage band, members invent multiple ways to conform, to be liked, and to maintain their acceptance by the group.

The desire to belong can also be used against us. In a previous era, what did teachers do with unruly students? They pulled them away from the class, made them sit in a corner, and put a dunce cap on their head. Ostracized and humiliated, such children likely conformed to the teacher's demands. Today, some parents still may discipline their teens by grounding them or restricting their use of social media. At a time in their lives when adolescents most value contact with their peers, this punishment can have a strong effect.

Fortunately, there are exciting examples of how peer pressure and social belonging can be used to motivate positive behavior. At a foundry in Western Massachusetts where the work is hot, dirty, loud, and extremely dangerous, the shift with the best record for safety and quality work was the one in which nearly all the workers had familial ties to Puerto Rico and who lived in the same neighborhood of Springfield, MA. The social bonds outside work had been transferred to the workplace.

In another situation, women doing assembly work sat at tables arranged row upon row. Their work ethic was spotty and the products were of questionable quality. Then

someone had a brilliant idea. They grouped the women into small teams and turned their tables so the women faced each other in small circles. In this arrangement, the women could help each other, share work ideas, and socialize. Productivity, quality, and engagement increased while absenteeism became nonexistent. The opportunity to connect, to belong, eliminated the drudgery of the work environment.

Sometimes a complex problem deserves a complex solution. But other times, positive peer pressure is the best way to discover a surprising solution.

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