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An oil rigger's insights on management, motivation and making work matter

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A Good Hand

An oil rigger's insights on management, motivation and making work matter

BY PAUL NOLAN

In 2013, Michael Patrick Smith, in his mid-30s at the time, moved from New York City to Williston, North Dakota, to find work in the oil fields of the Bakken Formation, which was then the epicenter of the fracking industry in North America. Smith, a theater major, playwright and musician, had no experience in that line of work, but he was dissatisfied with his office job and flailing at life in general.

In Williston, it took him a month to land a job as a “swamper,” which is physically punishing work tearing down skyscraper-sized oil rigs piece by piece, strapping them to trucks and moving them down dusty roads to be resurrected at the next site.

There was no formal training, despite the fact that, with cranes swinging metal parts weighing several tons, any mistake could be fatal. Shifts were 12 and 14 hours long in all the weather extremities that North Dakota serves up. The work was more physically demanding than anything Smith had ever experienced. His bosses — as much as there were bosses in the loosely organized hierarchy of the oil field — berated him, challenged him to physical fights and did everything they could to get him to quit.

But Smith stuck it out — often to his own surprise — and when he called it quits nearly a year later, he would look back

at his time as a swamper as the most defining work experience of his life (though he had little more in his bank account than when he arrived in North Dakota). He greatly respected the grizzled oil field veterans who cursed at him. He made friends with fellow swampers who were a decade younger than him, and who looked to Smith for insights on relationships, reading and carving out a meaningful life. Most importantly, he reconciled demons from his past, including failed relationships with women and a childhood riddled with abuse and tragedy.

Writing the Book on Swamping

Smith took several years to record what his oil field experience meant in words. The result is his first book, “The Good Hand: A Memoir of Work, Brotherhood, and Transformation in an American Boomtown,” which was published by Viking earlier this year.

When he was interviewed on National Public Radio’s “Marketplace” soon after publication, it felt like Smith had insights to share on management, motivation and making work matter that would be pertinent to the *Sales & Marketing Management* audience. His book is a beautifully written account of life in a hardscrabble world that makes the



Michael Patrick Smith thought he went to work in the oil fields of North Dakota purely for money, but discovered the job meant a whole lot more.

roughness of Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross" seem genial by comparison.

Smith himself would not recommend that others adopt the management style of the "Wildebeest," a caustic and cursing truck driver with whom Smith was frequently paired. But there were aspects of the Wildebeest's approach that broke through, reinforcing to Smith the importance of every action as well as the value of a day's worth of toil, sweat and physical pain.

"That particular job and the system around it is set up to be done by rough people. I found myself growing rougher and less nurturing," Smith told SMM in an extended interview. (Listen to the full interview on our new podcast [here](#).) "But there were always moments of kindness in a place where a person's identity — a person's likes and dislikes — were really unimportant to getting the task at hand accomplished. I find that is something in work I highly value. In our culture now there seems to be this premium on what people like or don't like. To have that stripped away and [replaced by] 'What we care about is how hard you're going to work and how much of a team player you're going to be.' There's something in that I find really beautiful and much more revealing of the human spirit than whether you listen to the same music as a guy."

Becoming a Hand

The book's title comes from the term that veteran oil field workers bestow on greenhorns once they grow into useful workers. It's a reminder of how powerful honorifics can be, even when there is no monetary reward attached to it.

"In the oil field, 'good hand' was a term used by other field hands. Truck drivers and the truck pushers, who would be equal to a foreman, everybody knew who was a good worker," Smith explains.

Sadly, a good hand was usually confirmed to be as such outside of their presence. Senior workers would discuss amongst each other which field workers had become good hands. A worker usually found out he'd earned the title only when it filtered back to him informally. That's a practice that managers in other work environments should definitely avoid. Smith says, "Praise wasn't easily forthcoming, but when it was said, the thing I heard was people didn't think I was going to last long but [then agreed] 'You've really become a good hand.'"

Smith somewhat reluctantly admits he became a good hand, and makes clear how much it means to him. "To most people it doesn't sound like a big deal. To me, it took on a spiritual dimension and a level of importance. One aspect to it is that



“When I got the white hard hat, it was one of the proudest days of my life. That may sound silly, but it’s true.”

you don’t make a hand every day. Even a good hand is going to have rough days. It’s something that I take with me with everything I do.”

In his book, he writes, “I thought I came to North Dakota to make money. I didn’t. I came to become a good hand.”

The Importance of Symbolic Awards

Symbolic awards also played a significant role in Smith’s growing into the job. New oil field workers are required to wear a green construction helmet for the first six months so they can be easily identified. After that, they receive a white hard hat (or “brain bucket” as it’s often called). As Smith explained, it’s partly initiation and partly a means for workers to know who in the field is new, as they are more likely to put others’ safety at risk. A truck driver nicknamed “the Viking” determined Smith deserved to receive his white hard hat when he was only slightly past his third month on the job. A dispatcher told Smith he’d have to wait, but the Viking nabbed a white hat surreptitiously and awarded it to Smith later.

“When I got the white hard hat, it was one of the proudest days of my life,” Smith says. “That may sound silly, but it’s true. The guys I worked with were aware of it, and they felt I had earned it. It wasn’t an easy place to earn respect. I was obsessed with the white hat. It became an incredibly important goal to me, and I was proud to wear it.”

Writing for a [small business website](#) owned by the *Houston Chronicle*, freelance writer Zach Lazzari states, “Look at any business model and you are sure to find a company with symbolic rewards that are used in the company culture. In some cases, a pay bonus or actual reward may accompany the symbolic gesture, but the pride in owning the reward is often the sole benefit. The way a company uses symbolism in their work environment ultimately has a major influence on the day-to-day operations and the way employees interact and perform their duties.”

When they could not find any empirical studies on the value of symbolic awards in the workplace — those that only increase

status and social recognition and do not come with a material benefit — European researchers Michael Kosfeld and Susanne Neckermann conducted their own study. [Their 2010 report](#) states, “the symbolic award significantly increases performance by about 12% on average. The award increases not only the average performance but also the variance of performance.”

Kosfeld and Neckermann add, “status and social recognition alone can be strong motivators for agents to increase their effort in the presence of awards. Our findings corroborate

recent arguments emphasizing the important role of symbolic rewards in labor relations that sometimes even outperform purely monetary incentives. The social recognition from an award crucially depends on the reputation and the image of the institution offering the award as well as on the individual achievement yielding the award. In this sense, it may actually be true that awards are better instruments in some domains than in others, and that the power of symbolic awards is affected by the reputation and the culture of the organization as well as by the objective individuals are expected to achieve.”

The researchers point out that intrinsic motivation is undoubtedly a factor in performance as well, but they had no way of measuring the intrinsic motivation of the participants in their study. “The conclusion from our study is not that purely symbolic awards increase performance always and in all circumstances. We hope that future research will be able to show under what conditions firms are well advised to use symbolic rewards to motivate workers and under what conditions symbolic rewards are likely to be ineffective and hence firms (should) also refrain from using them.”

Making Work Matter

Clearly, Smith was self-driven, which is every manager’s dream. “In the early days, I knew I didn’t have the money to leave town,” he admits. “After that, I came to the conclusion that just as a matter of personal pride, I felt I needed to get good at the job. I wasn’t going to be able to look at myself if I knew I had not given this incredibly difficult task my

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Patrick Smith

FEATURE STORY

100-percent all. For me, it was a question of tenacity and a feeling of self-worth.”

In addition to proving something to himself, the work itself became significant to Smith. He writes in his book about returning to New York at Christmas and entertaining his friends with stories about the oil fields over cocktails in a bar.

“I’m soaking it up, this chance to be a raconteur, this attention I’m receiving for my work, this opportunity to tell the tale. What I do in Williston lands here, I realize, taking in the elegant woodwork and the chandeliers. New York City reaps the benefits of labor done thousands of miles away on the desolate plains of North Dakota, the labor I do. I feel proud. That is what it means to be a good hand: to do meaningful work.”

Motivation is less about employees doing great work and more about employees feeling great about their work, states business adviser and author [Lisa Lai](#) in an article for [Harvard Business Review](#). “The better employees feel about their work, the more motivated they remain over time. When we step away from the traditional carrot or stick to motivate employees, we can engage in a new and meaningful dialogue about the work instead.” (See sidebar below.)

The Inextinguishable Nature of a Good Hand

In his book, Smith recounts a return to Williston after the New Year and working in the oil fields through a frigid winter. He considered making a career out of it, but ultimately decides against it, returning to the East Coast almost a year after he moved to North Dakota.

“I found the work really intoxicating and there was something to the lifestyle. But the whole time, I was questioning who I was and what I was doing there, which is probably why I am a better writer than an oil field hand,” he said. “It became more important to me to think about where I could have the biggest impact on society and whether I should take a gamble on that.”

Lessons that Smith learned stick with him to this day. No one is a good hand all the time, he says. You have to make a hand every day. At the end of his book, he asks, “How does a person in this age of gross overindulgence become and stay a good hand? An ideal that I see requires being of the world but also fashioning that world into something better, bigger, greater than the self. In a society that worships leisure, how do you maintain the fortitude to get up every day and go to work?”

A large part of that constant striving is intrinsic. Managers should look for signs of self-motivation when hiring. Ask prospective hires for examples of when they took initiative, how they sought learning opportunities, and whether they acted on feedback they received in previous positions.

Managers should also be mindful of motivation techniques that drive performance. Praising worthy performances in public, presenting symbolic awards and taking steps to make work meaningful for team members are all essential, whether one is supervising swamper in an oil field or pushing sales reps to hit quarterly goals. **smm**

How Managers Can Make Work More Meaningful

Employees are motivated when their work has relevance. Business adviser and author Lisa Lai offers these tips for how managers can make work more meaningful for those on their team:

Share context and provide relevance. To motivate your employees, start by sharing context about the work you’re asking them to do. What are we doing as an organization and as a team? Why are we doing it? Who benefits from our work and how? What does success look like for our team and for each employee? What role does each employee play in delivering on that promise?

Anticipate roadblocks to enable progress. Recognize that challenges can materially impact motivation. Be proactive in identifying and addressing them. What might make an employee’s work difficult or cumbersome? What can you do to ease the burden? How can you remain engaged just enough to see trouble coming and pave the way for success?

Recognize contributions and show appreciation. Leaders consistently underestimate the power of acknowledgment to bring forth employees’ best efforts. Employees are motivated

when they feel appreciated and recognized for their contributions.

Assess your own motivation. Employees feel motivated when their leaders are motivated. If you’re not engaged and enthusiastic about your company, your team or the work you do, it’s unlikely that you’ll be a great motivator of others. What aspects of your role do you enjoy? What makes you proud to lead your team? What impact can you and your team have on others both inside and outside the organization? How can you adapt your role to increase your energy and enthusiasm?



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How the Pandemic Year Changed Employee Recognition

BY PAUL NOLAN

Like everything else in the pandemic year, workplace recognition and managing teams for improved performance have been disrupted. In a virtual world, it's harder to gauge team members' needs, celebrate successes and make employees feel valued.

At the same time, human resource professionals and other workplace performance experts agree that taking steps to maintain a strong corporate culture, which includes frequent recognition, is more important than ever.

The virtual work world appears to be a reality for a majority of companies at least into the summer. Many companies have already announced long-term plans for a hybrid model of remote work and office time when it's safe to return to offices. Thus, it's wise to review recognition trends from 2020 to examine how businesses shifted to meet the challenges and

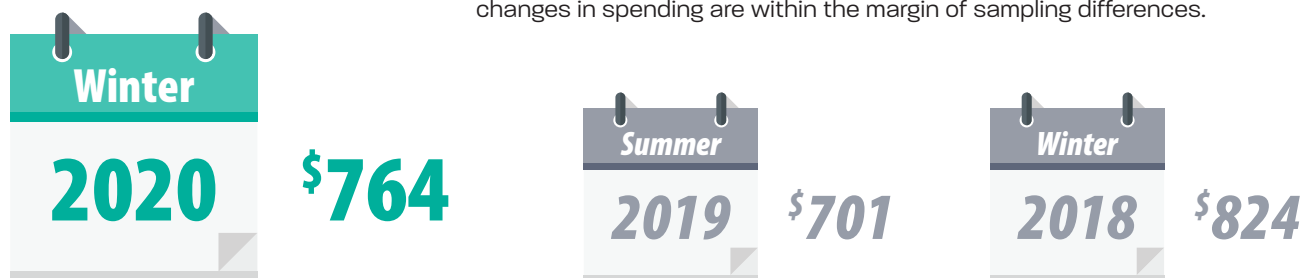
communications to get them excited, who can use a combination of communication and virtual technologies to create celebratory moments — are going to be the ones that find themselves with a more engaged work force and a more effective use of this work-from-home environment."

Gift Cards and Merchandise Get a Pandemic Bump

In a virtual world, touchless rewards make a lot of sense, so it's not surprising that IRF surveys during 2020 showed a 26% increase in the use of gift cards in workplace incentive programs since the pandemic started. "Gift cards, especially, allow for high levels of flexibility, creativity, efficiency and speed when used to motivate important audiences during the pandemic," states an IRF report on survey results.

Average Per-Person Spend

The current average per-person spend for non-cash reward and recognition programs is consistent with previous surveys, as any year-over-year changes in spending are within the margin of sampling differences.



what can be expected in the new work world that lies ahead.

"Employees continue to work in new — and for some people, unfamiliar — environments. It's more critical than ever for organizations to find ways to inspire employee performance while instilling the larger feeling of being connected to their company," says Stephanie Harris, president of the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) and a longtime veteran of the incentive industry.

"Communications become such a clear differentiator," Harris adds. "Those organizations that can clearly communicate to their employees about the value they bring — who can use

The IRF's Rewards Preferences study reported that "a significant merchandise gift" was ranked in both the top five employee preferences and the top five motivators.

Under normal circumstances, a number of companies create incentive travel programs for sales teams in which top performers earn their way on to a corporate retreat in an attractive location for a multiple-day celebratory event. Incentive travel was essentially shut down by COVID-19 in 2020 and continues to be suspended for the first half of this year. Some group events have been booked for the latter half of this year and even more have been scheduled for 2022. (See story on page 10).

Some companies simply postponed incentive travel programs until it's safe to hold them, while others shifted incentive budgets to gift cards, merchandise rewards, points programs and certificates for individual travel, the IRF reports.

A [2021 IRF Trends Report](#) states, "Looking ahead, the trend toward using more merchandise and gift cards continues. The IRF Industry Outlook for 2021 reports an overall predicted net increase of 33% for gift cards and 24% for merchandise. The average value of a merchandise reward is \$160, and 32% reported their average merchandise value to be \$200 and higher."

Casting a Wider Incentive Net

The downfall of some sales incentive programs that reward with high-priced travel and merchandise is they mostly motivate salespeople who are regularly top performers anyway. The IRF reports that lower-priced merchandise and gift cards proved to be effective motivators to broader audiences during the pandemic, and many incentive program owners are applying the lessons learned in 2021 and beyond.

“Tiered programs might focus on expensive incentive travel programs at the top tier, then add in merchandise and gift cards at the second and third tiers, allowing for a wider variety in per-person spend,” the report states. “A wider reach for incentive programs could play a critical role during recovery. It might be necessary to rebuild morale, engagement, trust and collegiality, and these are behaviors that the majority of employees must observe to move the needle. Incentive program owners may be identifying and rewarding many new behaviors that will reestablish new corporate cultures. Many of these efforts could involve smaller, frequent rewards on a larger scale.”

Harris, who worked in the incentive division of American Express among other companies before heading the IRF, says the focus on moving the middle is a necessary shift.

“Since I have been in this business, the majority of high-end programs have been designed in such a way that your top 5% to 10% are earning the big rewards. The middle 60% of producers often get forgotten. I think that’s a missed opportunity, especially as organizations work to recover and you need every single person in your organization giving incremental effort,” she says.

Showing your employees they are valued and appreciated is at the core of what drives performance and motivates human beings to achieve strong results, says Jeffrey Brenner, past president of the Incentive Manufacturers and Representatives Alliance (IMRA) and the director of special markets for Seiko Watch of America LLC. Brenner says it’s not only increasingly important to incorporate incentive efforts when teams are working from home, it’s critical to create a buzz about your incentive programs and keep them front-of-mind.

“In an office setting, there is more opportunity to discuss and promote a program on a daily basis. The necessity [when

About the IRF Outlook Survey

A total of 322 participants were recruited for the IRF Industry Outlook survey. Of the 322 participants, 39% represented corporate buyers, 24% represented direct gift card and merchandise suppliers, and 38% were third parties, such as incentive companies and consultants.

working from home] of frequent communication is critical to reach set goals. What we are seeing is the involvement of not only the employee/participant, but their family when selecting their reward, as they may now be more a part of the process due to the WFH setup,” Brenner says.

Embracing Digital Delivery

The ability to digitize gift card delivery, award points and merchandise award catalogs has existed for a decade or more, but more companies relied on these capabilities during the past year for obvious reasons. The IRF reports that many lessons were learned about the power of virtual engagement.

“Digital options enable immediate, coordinated, trackable delivery of rewards regardless of geographic location, and groups of employees can receive their reward at the same time, such as during a virtual meeting. Digital delivery can also increase control, enhance reporting, and reduce overall administration time for program owners.”

The IRF is encouraged by companies’ focus on maintaining a positive corporate culture and keeping workers motivated during the pandemic. IRF officials feel that bodes well for incentive and reward use this year and beyond.

“2020 was a year like no other, and 2021 will likely be unprecedented as well. With many industries anticipating recovery once the vaccine is distributed, what will emerge is a work force and sales landscape that in many ways has fundamentally changed,” The IRF report states. “Incentive, recognition and reward programs will need to be reimaged to motivate this changing environment, accelerate recovery, and meet the evolving goals of post-pandemic companies.” **smm**

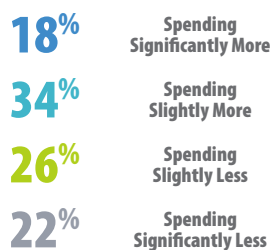
Change In Spending Since the Pandemic

Among the 64% who changed their investment in merchandise during the pandemic, 52% increased their spend, while 48% spent less.

54% of gift card users indicated they had a change in gift card spending. 64% increased their spend during the pandemic, while 36% spent less.



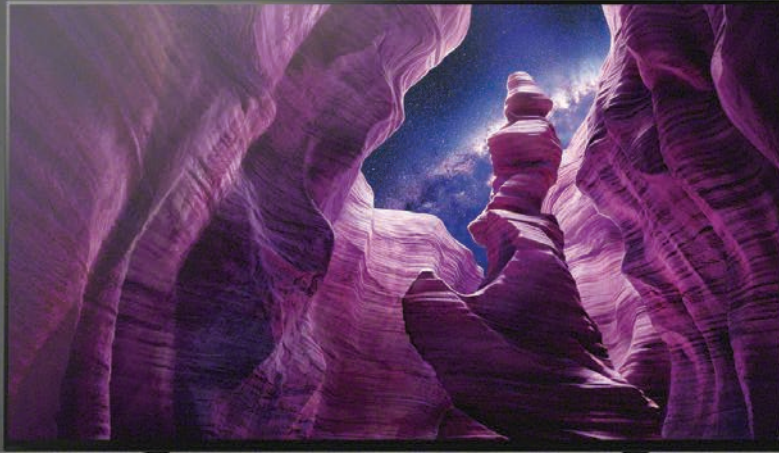
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Incentive Travel Experiences Are Too Treasured to Abandon

BY PAUL NOLAN

How desperate are people to travel again after a year in lockdown?

According to a survey of 2,000 adults in the U.S. and UK earlier this year by online accommodations platform trivago, one-quarter of both Britons and Americans say they would give up all of their savings to travel now. Nearly four out of 10 Americans (38%) say they would give up sex for a year to be able to hit the road immediately. One in five say they would give up their partner to travel now, and nearly half of Americans (48%) would give up their job to be able to travel.

That may say as much about respondents' satisfaction — or lack thereof — with their significant other and their job as it does about that eagerness to travel, but the desire to pack one's bags and go somewhere — maybe anywhere — is evident.

While it has widely been predicted that business travel will never return to pre-COVID levels, incentive travel — the concept of bringing groups of high-performers together to celebrate successes — could be a motivation tool that's too effective to abandon.

"I do not believe that incentive travel is something that can be replaced by a hybrid environment," said Stephanie Harris, president of The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF). "Incentive travel is inherently about connecting with other top performers in your organization. It's about getting exposure to senior management. It's about building collective memories and having shared experiences. That is a unique and inherently in-person experience."

Travel On Hold

An [IRF Pulse Survey](#) last July showed that just over 42% of incentive programs planned for last year were canceled, while many large group events were postponed. When the IRF surveyed incentive professionals for the July study, they indicated the second quarter of 2021 is the soonest incentive trips will be held for most program sizes, and that may be ambitious. Suppliers have noted that RFPs for incentive travel in 2022 and beyond are increasing.

In a survey of incentive travel users and suppliers by the IRF in partnership with the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) and the Financial and Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP), 70% of respondents said they expect a one- to two-year recovery period for incentive travel programs once effective vaccines are completely rolled out and global health officials report it is safe to hold large, in-person events. 53% of respondents to a survey by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) said their next in-person meeting is contingent on the distribution of a safe and effective vaccine.

Pádraic Gilligan, chief marketing officer at SITE, says, "Realistically, it will be Q2, 2022 before we see any international programs, and into 2023 before we see anything like the 2019

levels. Health security and duty of care will be key considerations as corporations recommence their meetings and incentives programs. We could easily find ourselves in a situation where there's a lag between individuals' willingness to attend corporate meetings and incentives and the corporations' own hyper-caution around allowing them to do so."

Change in Spending Since Pandemic with Incentive Travel



"There's a huge appetite to meet IRL (in real life), and we're also hearing this from our regular conversations with partners, exhibitors and buyers around the world," adds Carina Bauer, CEO of the [IMEX Group](#), a sponsor of global trade shows that bring meeting and event planners together with industry suppliers.

Starting Small

Some smaller regional events are already taking place, and Bauer expects those to continue to increase, with larger events re-emerging in 2022. After going virtual with its major industry trade shows in 2020 as well as the IMEX Frankfurt event planned for this spring, IMEX America is scheduled for Nov. 9-11 in Las Vegas, and Bauer says that will occur in person.

The IRF reports compression is already posing challenges for group travel in late 2021 and 2022. With so many

postponements and deferrals, organizations may have a hard time finding venues through next year. In addition to venue inventory, staffing reductions may cause delays. Hotels and destination management companies are slower to respond after furloughing staff. One incentive house reported that a provider turned down an RFP for a travel program in 2021 because they were too busy delivering on virtual events in Q1 of 2021 to quote for live events in Q3.

Bauer says the rise of virtual meetings and events may prompt some businesses to further scrutinize some of their business travel, but the very human need to meet face to face still remains. “Our time spent working remotely has taught us

that online doesn’t offer the same depth of experience or interaction that meeting face to face does. To be able to look someone in the eye and — dare I say it? — *shake* their hand is a powerful way of connecting people, building relationships and creating memories.”

Incentive travel also brings with it a sense of camaraderie that companies and participants alike are unwilling to give up, Bauer says. “The benefit of spending time together, outside of the work environment, and being part of an experience that’s specifically tailored to the group all brings massive benefits to both the individual and an organization.” **SMM**

Changes Afoot for Incentive Travel Programs

A full recovery is expected at some point, but the look of group travel may be forever changed

Safety is the priority for incentive travel program sponsors as they consider their options for reviving these effective efforts for driving performance. According to the Incentive Travel Industry Index (ITII), an annual survey of incentive travel buyers (end users and agencies) and sellers, buyers are shifting to match traveler sentiment.

“Sanitation and health security have joined emergency preparedness as top risk management strategies, while location preferences have shifted temporarily away from more dense, urban locations, cruise ships and all-inclusive resorts, and toward destinations perceived as safe,” the report states. Prior trends favored novel destinations farther afield. However, in a post-COVID

future, buyers plan to shift toward using destinations in their own region.

The survey is a joint effort of The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) and the Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals. It was conducted last September and October, and there were 2,356 total survey respondents.

A rebound is imminent, as 83% of buyers report senior management and other stakeholders remain committed to incentive travel. However, many also believe that incentive travel will need to fundamentally change to reduce risks.

Buyers hope that increased activity in the latter half of the year can help incentive travel to recover to 59% of 2019 levels. Most

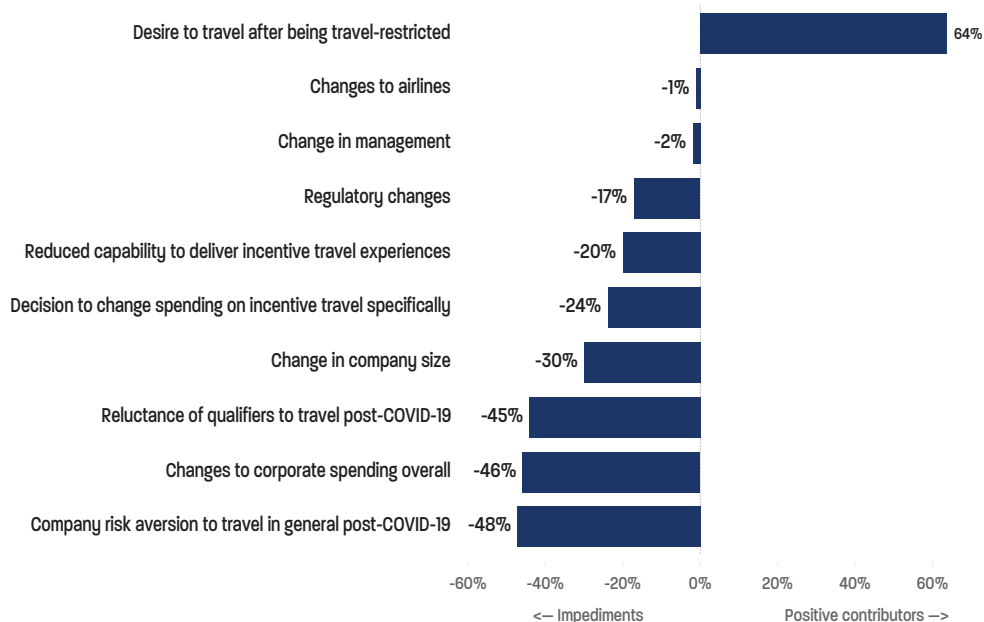
respondents (66%) expect a one- to two-year recovery of incentive travel once the virus is contained and post-COVID conditions are reached.

About 23% of respondents expect travel to be fundamentally different in a post-COVID world. About 65% expect it will be moderately changed, and the rest see it remaining similar to pre-COVID.

The report states that buyers plan to make large shifts toward wellness and flexible activities for individuals, as well as toward corporate social responsibility. In a continuation of shifts that first showed up in the 2019 survey, there will be more focus on what will delight travelers and less focus on group dining and team building.

Factors Impacting the Recovery

Respondents state that incentive program participants’ appreciation for travel will help fuel the recovery. That desire is countered by a number of negative factors, including risk-aversion on the part of companies, reluctance of qualifiers to travel and changes to corporate spending.



3 Steps for Maintaining a Positive Culture in a Remote World

BY NICOLE NEAL

What transpired as a necessity in the middle of a chaotic environment is finding its footing and is here to stay. We're talking about hybrid work environments, and they are coming back bigger and better than ever. According to a recent study by PwC, 83% of employees claim remote work environments have been a success. Employees appreciate the flexibility offered by a blend of on-site and at-home work, and they value companies that allow them this flexibility.

Remote working has given employees unprecedented freedom of choice. Employees can now choose where they live, where in their house they set up their office or, in some cases, even the choice to work during those hours in which they are most productive.

Another major choice they have in this post-pandemic world is the freedom to easily leave a job if the situation isn't right for them. However, approximately 76% of employees state they would be more willing to stay with their current company if they could work flexible hours, and 25% of organizations that do allow for remote work have a lower employee turnover rate.

When the workforce can literally go anywhere, it's time to double-down on retention efforts. This includes turning our attention inward and adapting our work environments to ensure we are setting our hybrid teams up for success.

Here are three important changes you can make to align workers around a common purpose and increase your culture, flexibility and openness in the workplace:

Increase recognition — You most likely have recognition programs already built into your organization. But are they enough? According to a survey we conducted to measure the relationship between trust, alignment and commitment among employees and their companies, 74% of employees reported they were more likely to remain an employee of that company if they felt they were being properly recognized.

Don't wait for an annual celebration or performance review to reap praise on your team members. Instead, surprise and delight with employee gifts like points they can redeem on a reward platform. These points can be awarded at any time, are extremely easy to gift to remote employees, and your employees have the freedom of choice in how they spend their rewards points.

Improve work/life harmony — The relationship between our work and our life is actually quite complex. What's successful one day may not be so successful the next, depending on work schedules, school assignments, board meetings or kids' sports practices. Plain and simple, it's hard to achieve work/life balance. Instead, let's think of it as work/life harmony.



According to our survey (conducted prior to the start of the pandemic) 42% of employees said they were more likely to remain in their jobs if their work situation was flexible enough to meet their personal and family needs. The pandemic has amplified the need for work/life harmony, and flexible work environments support this more than ever. In order to retain top talent and keep your workforce engaged, it is important to understand that work/life harmony is a fluid situation that changes as employees' needs change.

Implement a reward and recognition program —

Verbal compliments and handwritten cards only go so far in recognizing your team. We all like to be rewarded for a job well done. It's time you up the ante and formalize a rewards and recognition program to improve the relationship between your organization and your team.

Rewards and recognition programs incentivize your remote and in-person teams to work toward a common goal. Your team is inspired and motivated to do their best work because they are rewarded for their efforts along the way. In the end, rewards and recognition programs do wonders at creating a team environment, establishing trust among colleagues, and deepening the commitment from your employees. When properly designed, they lead to increased outputs which improve your company's bottom line.

Your employees have many choices, and that can be a bad thing. Help them make the easy choice to stay with your company by offering the flexibility they desire and engaging them along the way with a positive work culture. **smm**

Nicole Neal is vice president of employee Xperience at [One10](#), which provides incentive and recognition programs, travel and events and marketing services that inspire employees, dealers, channel partners and customers for many of the world's largest brands.



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Why 2021 Requires a New Type of Sales Manager

BY HAGGAI LEVI, CEO, [SETSAIL](#)

COVID-19 turned the world of sales upside down. Millions of reps now sell from their homes and sales leaders are in search of new ways to motivate their teams. One thing is clear to all of us: the pandemic made existing sales productivity challenges more pronounced and created new ones. As leaders, we need to find ways to shift our operating philosophy for this new age of sales.

Even before the pandemic, there was a widely recognized struggle among heads of sales: A widely accepted statistic is that 20% of reps drive 80% of the revenue. Increasing the performance of the majority of the sales team has always been the manager's biggest priority.

Before 2020, shared office environments and proximity to manager/coaches helped with driving results, managing pipelines or jumping in to move a stuck deal forward. With that interaction no longer available—at least short term—the revenue gap in sales is widening.

I work with sales leaders every day to help with their revenue goals, and the ones that get the most out of their teams today have three things in common.

1. Virtual Motivation Champions (AKA Micro Motivation Champions)

According to the [2020 State of Sales](#) study by Salesforce, 48% of reps feel less productive than they used to. We are in a completely new territory of sales motivation—and it's here to stay. A few important things that motivated reps, such as perks

of travel and face-to-face customer meetings, are gone for now. In addition, the tools that reps use to manage their work weren't built for an always-on environment. They are simply not engaging enough. Leaders that realize the shift are leading the way with two key trends in sales motivation:

- **Motivating reps in real time becomes the norm.**

Motivation is the new currency of sales. Understanding that the low-touch experience of today's virtual selling makes it hard to move deals forward, adapting sales leaders are shifting the focus from the end result of a big win to motivating a lot of small wins that lead to it. They become true virtual motivation champions and embrace the concept of micro incentives to motivate them each step of the way.

- **Tracking and rewarding sales activities is dead.**

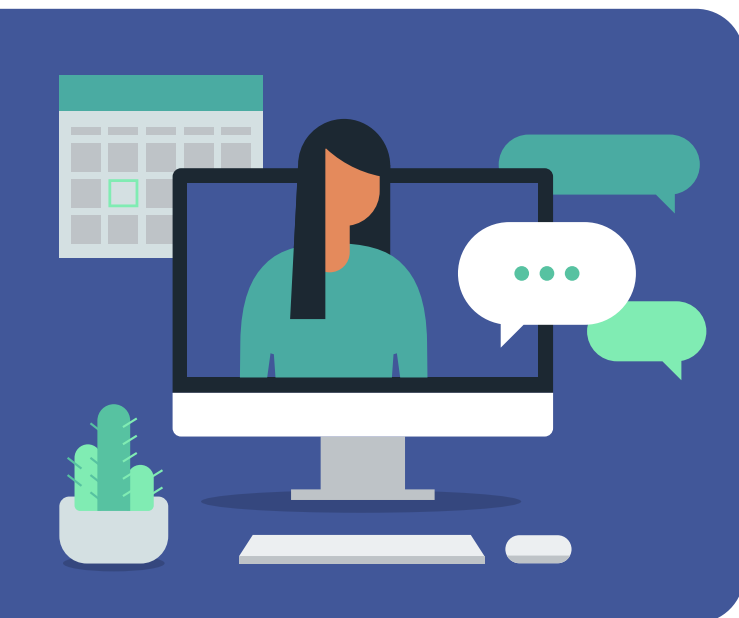
We have a customer who, before enlisting help from SetSail, gamified tracking and rewarding the activities of sales reps to make sure they were "putting in the work." Rewards were based on how many emails and calls reps made. The winner was a rep who ended up selling the least. Turns out he was frequently chatting with his girlfriend at a key account he owned.

Tracking sales activities is the wrong way to measure progress. In an age when we have so much data about our customers and their touchpoints, and with AI analyzing all that, it's time to do tracking right. It's the customers' responses to reps' efforts that need to be tracked and rewarded. You can email all you want, but if the customer doesn't respond with positive language, you are doing something wrong and should not be rewarded.

2. Masters of Data, At a Whole New Level

Did you know that having six-plus active contacts in an early stage of a deal results in 62% win rate? Are you aware that five or more meetings accepted and held increase win rate by 47%? These numbers are specific to a large enterprise customer we worked with based on the insights from 654 deals. They use this data daily to identify deals that show fewer indicators of success, and focus their attention accordingly to hit their overall revenue goals.

Do you have those metrics in place for your business? New age sales leaders must reach that level of granularity in understanding their pipeline. That's a whole new level of data mastery. Luckily, there is more digital footprint of sales activities than ever before. Tools from call recording to email integration with CRM allow leaders to track activities and gain both deep and broad visibility into what's going on.



3. Whizzes of Automation, from Data to Behaviors

Finally, new age sales leaders must be whizzes of automation. But it won't be enough to just have data. When I headed the data science team for Google's major sales divisions, I was the first to bring all the data and insights to sales leaders to act on. My team would build dozens of dashboards (we even built a dashboard to monitor if dashboards were being used) with perfect charts and annotations. But none of that led to enough action.

That's when we decided to put that data into action and automate steps from data all the way to rep behavior. We first derived those signals that lead to success, like getting VP engagement in a deal or multi-threading activities. We then translated them to rep behaviors on a point-based system. Automation came in tying micro incentives to those steps and to the rep's daily workflow. The results were astonishing. The average attainment of reps among a team of a few thousand

more than doubled. That level of automation — from data all the way to behaviors — is exactly what this all-digital and remote-selling world needs.

With COVID-19 vaccine distribution moving swiftly, we hopefully are nearing a return to normal for our daily lives. But the world of office work is unlikely to return to the pre-2020 era. The pandemic pushed many companies across industries to create liberal work-from-home policies. The impact on sales teams will be long-lasting. For sales leaders, this means the new approaches for motivating remote teams, using data to monitor and improve daily behaviors, and truly automating the sales process will be indispensable tools for success in the next decade and beyond. **SMM**

Haggai Levi is CEO of [SetSail](#), providers of a signal-based selling platform that helps sales managers gain visibility beyond rep activity into actual deal progress.

Worker engagement rollercoasters through the pandemic

Following a turbulent 2020, U.S. employee engagement increased to 39% in January, up from 36% late last year, according to a Gallup study. Gallup has long studied the topics of job satisfaction and engagement. Its [latest report](#) states, "While engagement growth has been slow and steady in the past decade, the disruptions of 2020 brought never-before-seen fluctuations in workplace cultures."

Last March, as work and life were first disrupted due to COVID-19, the overall well-being of Americans declined sharply. However, employee engagement increased to 37% in March 2020 from 35% in 2019, according to the report.

Employee engagement dropped last June amid protests surrounding the killing of George Floyd. Engagement dropped most significantly among managers, non-White respondents and those with Democratic political party affiliation or independents, according to Gallup.

The engagement of U.S. workers in late June and early July then reversed course to a record level of 40% engaged. In mid-July through September, rates reverted to the early COVID-19 level of

36%. Based on a sampling of workers from January 2021, 39% of U.S. workers are engaged while 14% are actively disengaged.

Gallup cites these significant developments regarding workplace engagement during the pandemic:

- 1. Employees say they are getting more feedback.** 45% of workers say they have gotten feedback from their manager either daily or a few times per week. This is up from 26% in 2019. But only 28% strongly agree they received meaningful feedback in the past week, up from 19% in 2019. Gallup has found meaningful feedback is a critical factor in the engagement of all workers, especially remote ones.
- 2. Engagement among hybrid employees has improved.** Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employees who work remotely at least some of the time had the highest levels of engagement. This continued during 2020, and engagement increased by two percentage points to 43% in the second half of last year. 56% of workers continue to work remotely at least some of the time in January

2021. Among them, 44% have found remote working to be a preference going forward, while 39% would prefer to go back to working in an office once restrictions are lifted.

- 3. Those who work from home all or nearly all of the time reported higher burnout.** In 2019, 18% of people who fully worked from home reported burnout very often or always — lower than those who worked from home some or none of the time. In 2020, 29% of people who fully worked from home reported burnout very often or always — higher than those who worked from home some or none of the time.
- 5. Manager engagement is too low.** In 2020, manager engagement, already low, declined from 34% to 33% in the first to second half of the year. The engagement of managers is critical because they set the tone for the engagement of the people who report to them. Managers affect 70% of the variance in team engagement. The decreases in engagement during June of 2020 were associated with declines in manager engagement. **SMM**

Make a return to the office easier for everyone



While some companies have announced long-term or even permanent remote work policies, others are eager to bring teams together in the office when it is safe and when employees feel comfortable doing so. In a [recent article](#) for *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy, coauthors of the book “No Hard Feelings: The Secret

Power of Embracing Emotions at Work,” offered these steps leaders can take to make employees feel supported and safe ahead of an eventual return to the workplace.

- **Be transparent.** Don’t wait to communicate what you’re thinking, even if there’s limited information to share. Even if you can’t offer a specific answer yet, your teams will feel comforted knowing that you’re not actively ignoring the issue. The goal of transparency is to earn trust and reduce unnecessary stress.
- **Discover employees’ concern early on.** Send out surveys asking workers how many days per week they

would like to work in the office; what will make a return easier; whether there are circumstances that could make a return to the office difficult or scary; and what types of work they prefer to do from home or from the office. Share the results and do everything you can to incorporate your findings into the workplace policies.

- **Highlight what your teams will gain with in-person time.** Employees who have gotten used to working from home may not see the benefit of going back to the office. If there were specific pre-COVID-19 culture events or celebrations that people enjoyed, share a plan for how you’ll restart them when everyone is together again. Numerous surveys in the past year have shown that employees agree that collaborating and building important workplace relationships are easier in person.
- **Present the return to the office as an experiment.** To ease people’s anxiety, frame the return to offices as an iterative process. Tell them your organization will try version 1 of a hybrid work setup and will adjust policies based on employee feedback. This will help workers feel that it doesn’t have to be perfect in the beginning. **SMM**

5 Keys to Better Performance Reviews

If your one-on-one reviews leave employees rolling their eyes — managers often are the last ones to discover this — here are five tips from HR service provider [Primehr](#) to make performance reviews more meaningful for everyone involved.

1 Continuous feedback. Don’t wait until annual or semiannual review time to offer feedback. Provide suggestions and guidance throughout the year. Give both informal and formal positive and negative feedback regularly.

2 Consistently perform formal evaluations at the same time for everyone. While this increases the workload of managers and supervisors during review time, it forces direct comparisons of employees and establishes a non-biased system.

3 Regular management meetings. Supervisors will learn from each other’s experiences. Provide adequate training and insist on candid observations.

4 Clearly communicate to employees what their duties are and what satisfactory performance is. Accomplish this through periodic reviews of job descriptions, training, and both formal and informal reviews.

5 Tell employees the criteria upon which their performance will be reviewed. Develop standards and establish reasonable goals for employees. Make sure that employees understand the consequences of their failure to improve. **SMM**



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Leadership Lessons from Our COVID Year

BY LARRY PRINCE

Business leaders have been forced to make difficult decisions in the past year, resulting in clarity around leadership. Let's call this COVID Clarity — key realizations borne out of the pandemic. One of the key takeaways in clarity is that your people are your most important asset, especially in challenging times.

More than ever, it's clear that employees are more than a box on an organizational chart. Because of the challenges of the pandemic, they've become partners in the future of your business.

Michael, a business owner, told me, "People, People, People — I learned the importance of having the right team of capable and adaptable employees and salespeople." In Michael's business, which provides home access for individuals with limited mobility, it's been his biggest lesson learned, during the COVID crisis. With his example in mind, let's take a look at three COVID Clarity questions to consider.

Am I spending the right quality time with my people?

Since the pandemic began, you've been in consistent contact with your employees, which is important. Understandably, most of your interactions may have focused on core sales tasks and solving problems. Yet, most business owners and sales leaders have gotten away from the informal interactions and personal discussions that connect you to your people and build trust and belief in your leadership. *Now, it's time to "plan" for "unplanned conversations."*

Map out time with your team to discuss how the past year has affected each person. Then ask: *How can I help you?* From these talks, you'll better understand the emotional tenor of your people. Consider meeting in person. Your people are a wealth of information about what's happening in the company, with customers and in the market. Asking their opinion and their input will help them know that they're part of the solution, and that is motivating.

Are my employees sure of their roles?

Many of your employees have found themselves in unfamiliar functions and often working remotely — even as sales professionals. Employees need to be clear on the what, why and how to get their work done. With so many people working remotely, the opportunity is ripe for assumptions. Many employees wake up each day unclear of their focus and core responsibilities because of changes during the past months. Clarify and provide the reason for their new or adjusted role.



Is our senior management team fully aligned?

Management team alignment has risen to the top of the list of challenges. Lack of coordination leads to frustration and unclear direction for employees. Recently the CEO of a company voiced her disappointment that two managers were working against each other and causing delays. In another example, the issue led to unclear brand messaging to their customer base. One business owner told me they lost a talented employee due to a lack of management alignment.

The best way to restore alignment is to set common goals for your management team that they can communicate to their direct reports. The coordinated planning and implementation to achieve these common goals serve to align team collaboration and functioning.

Recently, a construction company CFO confided that since last spring, every interaction with her financial manager was job related. They neither met in person nor talked on the phone about how the manager was doing. The CFO felt she wasn't connecting with her colleague — and maybe even losing the thread that previously united them. She decided to schedule time in person to sit and just talk — like they did naturally in the office almost each day prior to the pandemic. In just one interaction, the CFO learned a few things that would have gone undiscovered had she relied only on email and video communications. That sort of connected leadership contributes to employee retention and continued engagement.

As you carve a path forward, reflect on what you have learned through a period of great uncertainty and apply these lessons in making change. Trust your leadership skills and your people to transform challenge into opportunity.

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