

# MOTIVATION STORIES

A FACILITATION GUIDE AND  
WORKSHEET FOR  
UNCOVERING WHAT  
MOTIVATES YOUR TEAM

# MOTIVATION STORIES

## Why ask for motivation stories?

Motivation stories are those experiences we can recall where a person or situation brought out the very best - or the very worst - in us. They're important to reflect on as they point to the situations, environments, and support we need to thrive, as well as the conditions under which we wither.

When we ask for others to share their motivation stories, we **uncover insights into specific things we might do to support them** to reach their full potential and avoid burnout.

## When to ask?

While you can ask someone to share his or her motivation stories with you at any time, moments to consider are:

- When you bring together a new team, or bring on a new hire;
- If you sense something is off or relationships are strained on your team; or
- At the outset of a big project or initiative.

## Whom to include in the discussion?

Involve those whose actions and behaviours have the most impact on the other people present. This probably means bringing your core team together. However, depending on the nature of your work, you might also consider including those with whom your team frequently interacts, and on whose work you depend (IT, marketing, legal, security, etc.). Regardless, for a more intimate and trust-building environment, we recommend under eight people.

# How do you facilitate motivation stories?

## PART 1: MOTIVATION STORIES

**Begin by stating the purpose** – “We want to share our motivation stories to inform how we interact as a team. The goal is to better understand each other and what we can do to bring out the best of this team.”

**Invite participation** – Have all participants take 1-2 minutes to reflect on a professional situation that brought out the very best in them. When did they enjoy their work the most, were most motivated to bring all their talents to the job, and perhaps accomplished more than they thought possible?

Have participants take notes on the key features of that work that made it so inspiring, and especially what the people around them said and did to contribute to that feeling of thriving.

Invite whoever wishes to share their story when they feel ready, taking note of the behaviours and approaches that most motivate the people on your team.

**Identify trends and ideas to put into practice** – When everyone who wants to has shared, ask the group if they hear any trends in the stories, and what they wish to take away from those insights. “Are there any behaviours or ways of interacting that we may want to adopt as norms on our team?”

The leader of the team concludes by sharing what they heard, and will strive to do differently going forward to better motivate the team. After role modeling this humility and desire to learn and improve, they then invite anyone else to share what they aspire to take away and do differently.

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*You can stop there with a plan for instituting behaviours that motivate team members. However, if you would also like to prevent or change destructive behaviours, then continue with Part 2.*

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## PART 2: DEMOTIVATION STORIES

**Begin by stating the purpose** – “We want to share stories of work environments that diminished our motivation, and perhaps even our confidence. By hearing each other’s stories we hope to gain insight and appreciation for how our behaviours, judgements and emotional state may be impacting those around us.”

**Invite participation** – Have all participants take 1-2 minutes to reflect on a professional situation where they withered, perhaps burned out, or only brought a small fraction of their talents to the job. When did their work feel frustrating, tedious or exhausting? What specifically did their boss or coworkers say and do to that diminished their confidence or desire to do the work?

Invite whoever wishes to share their story when they feel ready. However, before anyone shares, ask participants to avoid using names or identifying characteristics. Yes, we want to learn about what their former coworkers said and did that was unhelpful, but in the interest of respect for other people, identities should remain confidential.

When participants share what others did to demotivate them, always ask, “What do you think caused that person to behave in that way?” and “What do you think they were trying to accomplish?” This encourages the group to reflect on what the offending person may have intended, and empathize with the conditions that may have caused an otherwise great teammate to cause harm.

As participants share, invite everyone to take note of the behaviours and approaches that demotivate those on your team.

**Identify trends** – When everyone who wants to has shared, ask the group if they hear any trends in the stories. “What are the behaviours you heard that have a tendency to demotivate?”

Some common offenders are:

- Micromanaging or expecting perfection
- Withholding negative feedback (often comes off as passive aggressive)
- Setting unreasonable standards for work output
- Coaching or just taking over when work isn’t up to par
- Ignoring suggestions, concerns or ideas
- Tolerating or excusing an underperforming or toxic teammate

**Individual Reflection** – When you have your list of behaviours, invite everyone to think of a time when they were stressed, felt overwhelmed, over their head, or were otherwise struggling at work. And with this time in mind, ask them to go down the list of demotivating behaviours item by item, asking themselves, ‘Is there anything that I do – especially when stressed – that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?’

Ask participants to be brutally honest and make a list of their own demotivating habits or tendencies, and when they tend to show up.

These tendencies are often well intentioned: We micromanage to ensure quality; we withhold feedback to protect feelings, etc. Ask participants to consider their intentions or goals in acting in those demotivating ways. Then inquire, “Are there other ways to accomplish the same objectives without diminishing motivation?”

Close by inviting them to go through the items on their lists and decide what first steps they can take to stop doing what they know is unhelpful.

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## FLOW CHART

INTRO

### EXPLAIN THE PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE

- “The goal is to better understand each other and what we can do to bring out the best of this team.”

REFLECT

### ASK TEAM MEMBERS TO REFLECT

- Have each member of the team reflect on a work situation that brought out the best in them and note all the things coworkers said and did to contribute to that feeling of thriving.

MOTIVATING  
BEHAVIOURS

### SHARE STORIES TO UNCOVER MOTIVATING BEHAVIOURS

- When everyone who wants to has shared, ask “Are there any behaviours or ways of interacting that we may want to adopt as norms on our team?”
- The boss or team lead concludes this part by sharing what they will do differently, and invites others to do the same.

INTRO

### INTRODUCE THE PURPOSE OF DEMOTIVATION STORIES

- “We want to share stories of work environments that diminished our motivation to gain insight into how our behaviour impacts those around us.”

REFLECT

### ASK TEAM MEMBERS TO REFLECT

- Have each team member reflect on a work situation where they withered, taking note of all the things their boss and teammates said and did to diminish their confidence or desire to work.

DEMOTIVATING  
BEHAVIOURS

### SHARE STORIES TO UNCOVER DEMOTIVATING BEHAVIOURS

- Share these stories without using names or identifying characteristics, and with empathy for what may have caused coworkers to act in a demotivating way.
- When everyone who wants to has shared, ask the group if they hear any trends in the stories. “What are the behaviours you heard that have a tendency to demotivate?”

INDIVIDUAL  
ACTION PLANS

### COMMIT TO ACTION

- With team demotivators listed, each participant asks themselves, ‘Is there anything I do that resembles the items on this list?’
- Each person decides on first steps that will help them avoid their own demotivating tendencies.

# MOTIVATION STORIES

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## REFLECTION WORKSHEET

### PART 1: MOTIVATION STORIES

Think of a time when a manager or peer brought out the very best in you. What did your boss or teammate do and say that made it so motivating?

How did this affect your work or performance?

Upon reflecting and hearing the motivating experiences of others, what resonated with you? What might you need from your boss and/or peers to feel motivated?

How might you as a leader create courage on your team?

### PART 2: DEMOTIVATION STORIES

Think of a work situation where you withered. What did your boss and teammates do and say to diminish your confidence or desire to work?

What do you think caused that person to behave in that way? What do you think they were trying to accomplish?

Upon reflecting and hearing the demotivating experiences of others, are there any behaviours or ways of interacting that have a tendency to demotivate?

Is there anything that you do that in any way, shape, or form resembles items above?

What are first steps to help you avoid your own demotivating tendencies?