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| There are many ways that you can motivate and inspire your team.  For instance, you can provide a positive, exciting workplace, with plenty of opportunities to build strong relationships. You can use incentives, such as bonuses or other rewards, to keep your team focused. And you can provide great support, and publicly recognize people's hard work.  However, recent research has shown that the way that people complete their work can also have a significant effect on motivation, and that's what we're looking at in this article.  *Recognize progress, and boost motivation. © iStockphoto/AndrewLilley*  In it, we'll see how consistent progress in the form of "small wins" can boost people's motivation and performance, and we'll explore strategies that you can use to help your own team achieve small wins as part of their work.  **About the Theory**  Professor Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer wrote in detail about how progress can boost performance in their 2011 book, "[The Progress Principle](http://www.amazon.com/Progress-Principle-Ignite-Engagement-Creativity/dp/142219857X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1317826132&sr=8-1)."   In their research, they asked 238 people (from 26 project teams in seven major organizations) to keep an anonymous diary, so that they could track their experiences on a daily basis. They received more than 12,000 separate diary entries, which they used to analyze people's "inner work lives" - their perceptions, emotions, and motivation levels - and to explore how this affected their performance.  They found that when people consistently take steps forward - even small steps - on meaningful projects, they are more creative, productive, and engaged, and they have better relationships. This, in turn, has a positive influence on their work performance.  In short, achieving and recognizing regular "small wins" helps people have rich, engaged, and productive work lives. As any experienced manager knows, happy, engaged, and productive team members can achieve far more than unhappy team members.  **Applying the Theory**  So, how can you apply this theory with your team?  Amabile and Kramer identified six things that you can do to give people the best chance of experiencing and recognizing meaningful progress.  These are:  **1. Set Clear Goals and Objectives**  When people have unclear or changing goals, they don't know what to focus on. This means that they're likely to be less engaged with the work they're doing, and they're unlikely to see the small tasks that they do as "wins."  So, make sure that you set [SMART](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_87.htm#np) (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals for everyone on your team; and change them only when you have to. Your people need to understand what's expected of them, so that they know when they've achieved these goals.   They also need to understand the connection between the work that they're doing and the value that it provides to others, whether these are the organization's customers, the organization itself, or even society as a whole. After all, we all want to feel that our work has meaning, and that it benefits others.  Help your team make this connection by using [Management by Objectives](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_94.htm#np). This is a useful way of aligning your people's objectives with the goals of your organization.  **2. Allow Autonomy**  Although your people need specific goals, they need some freedom to decide how they accomplish these goals - the more control that people have over their own work, the more empowered and creative they'll be, and the more they'll recognize their own achievements (even on small tasks).  So, make sure that you [avoid micromanagement](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_90.htm#np) - this destroys morale and engagement, and leaves no room for autonomy.  **Tip 1:** Our article on [Laissez Faire versus Micromanagement](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_47.htm#np) explores how to find the right balance between "hands off" and "hands on" management.  **Tip 2:** This approach won't work in all situations (for example, where people have to follow strict safety procedures).  **3. Provide Resources**  Without sufficient resources in place, it will be difficult for your people to succeed consistently in their work. They may conclude that their work isn't important, and they may waste time on non-core tasks that don't help them reach their objectives.  So, make sure that your people have the tools and resources they need to do their jobs properly. This includes technology, knowledge (including [training and development](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/team-development.htm#np)), support, and supplies.   **4. Allow Ample Time**  Your people need enough time to complete their work: consistently setting short deadlines will harm creativity, drive down work quality, and cause burnout.   That being said, there is an optimum amount of pressure that can actually enhance performance. Therefore, you need to provide the right amount of pressure - try to set deadlines that create enough pressure to motivate good performance, yet still allow people the freedom to be creative and innovative. (Our article on the [Inverted-U Model](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/inverted-u.htm#np) has more on the relationship between pressure and performance.)  **5. Provide Support and Expertise**   Make sure that your team has access to the help and expertise of other people, so that they can move forward with their work.   As their manager, this includes you, but it also includes other managers, colleagues, outside experts, or even customers and suppliers.  Also, foster a collaborative environment, where people can [be creative](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/team-creativity.htm#np) and bounce ideas around.  **Tip:** Our Expert Interview with professor [J. Richard Hackman](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/club/interviews/Richard-Hackman.htm) has more on creating a collaborative work environment for your team.  **6. Learn from "Failure"**  No matter how well you plan and prepare, there will be times when people fail at tasks or projects. This will sometimes be because their work was careless, however, other times, people may have done their genuine best, but failed for reasons outside their control.  Clearly, sloppy work needs to be dealt with appropriately.  However, some organizations deal harshly with honest failure. This not only lowers morale and makes people afraid to try new things, but it also encourages them to see failures as wasted time, rather than as experiences that they can learn from.   Support your people when they've done their honest best, but have still failed. Without assigning blame, discuss how all of you will move forward and grow. Teach them how to overcome [fear of failure](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/fear-of-failure.htm#np), and allow them to take appropriate risks.   **Recognize and Celebrate Success**  These six mechanisms will help your people make consistent, meaningful progress. However, it's particularly important that you routinely recognize and celebrate success.  Encourage people to keep track of their achievements and successes on a daily basis, for example, by keeping a diary of their achievements.  Then celebrate these in team meetings, and [reward your people](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_54.htm#np) for their small wins. This doesn't have to be a monetary reward - a heartfelt "thank you" and simple recognition is often reward enough.  Also, take the time to learn from people's successes. [After Action Reviews](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_73.htm#np) and [Appreciative Inquiry](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_85.htm#np) are great for this!  **Tip:** Amabile and Kramer's Progress Theory is an important and useful approach to motivation.   Other key approaches include [Herzberg's Motivator/Hygiene Factor Theory](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_74.htm#np), [McClelland's Human Motivation Theory](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/human-motivation-theory.htm#np), and [Sirota's Three Factor Theory](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_57.htm#np).  You can also test your motivation skills with our [How Good are Your Motivation Skills?](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_67.htm#np) self-test.  **Key Points**  The Progress Theory was developed by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer.   They determined that achieving consistent, small wins was t |
| he biggest indicator of a rich inner work life. This rich inner work life, in turn, enables people to be more productive, more engaged, and more creative in the work that they do.  Amabile and Kramer came up with six mechanisms that managers can use to help their team achieve small wins:   1. Set clear goals and objectives. 2. Allow autonomy. 3. Provide resources. 4. Allow ample time. 5. Provide support and expertise. 6. Help people learn from "failure."   As well as using these mechanisms, you should also encourage your people to recognize and celebrate their own successes, however small. |