Motivation as a Self-management Technique for Wildlife Conservation Agencies

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Abstract: Too few supervisors are present in conservation agencies to adequately oversee and motivate conservation officers. In order to properly manage these officers, self-management techniques need to be implemented. To initiate self-management, the supervisor must learn what motivates an employee; give the employee some responsibility; show him the importance of his job; provide proper equipment, training, recognition, and pay raises when applicable; and allow the employee to participate in the decision making process. The supervisor must also be trustworthy, honest, promote positive attitudes, and exhibit interest in the employee. By utilizing these techniques, we will not only get the most out of our employees, but also improve conservation of wildlife resources.

Conservation officers and wildlife and fisheries biologists are the most important component of a conservation agency. Without them, populations of game and fish would not occur in the high numbers that they do today. Due to low pay, danger on the job, and long hours, personnel are spread at minimal levels to adequately manage and conserve the wildlife resource. Because of these employee levels, there are also few supervisors to oversee field personnel. Nevertheless, they still need to feel good about themselves and their jobs (Garrison 1980). In order to do this and stimulate employees to be more productive, we must supervise in such a way that employees are motivated to achieve their potential.

Motivation is the act or process of providing a person with something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act in a desired way. If we do not encourage employees to motivate themselves, the agency will suffer in efficiency, morale, and overall effectiveness.

To begin with, an employee must have trust in his supervisor, and this trust must be reciprocated (White 1984). In many organizations employees do not trust

their supervisors. Why? The average supervisor does not take the time to develop a sense of trust between the employee and himself. Several things can be done to increase this. For example, always try to say "How's it going?" or "How are you?" or "Good Morning" (Caruth and Noe 1985). This is small talk but it can increase trust between the supervisor and the employee. My boss once told me "If you ever get in trouble or if you are caught somewhere you shouldn't be, I will back you up, but you better be prepared to discuss it with me later." This added to my trust in him. If an employee trusts you, he will try to keep your name "looking good" and he might also inform you of events that he might not have because of this trust.

If you tell an employee something, live up to it (i.e., keep your word). Don't tell him something that you think will happen unless you specifically say you think it will.

Learn what motivates each employee (Caruth and Noe 1984). Is it money, recognition, job enrichment, responsibility or what? By knowing this, you can do a much better job at managing individuals and promoting higher productivity (Davidson 1983).

Give an employee some responsibility (Garrison 1980, Nowlin 1984). Don't just give an employee a menial job; give him one of importance. This will increase his self-esteem and make him feel good about the job.

Describe the importance of that particular employee's job to him (Nowlin 1984). For example, you might say "John, you are doing a great job. Just last week you broke up that spotlighting ring in Lafayette County and the deer herd is probably going to increase in that part of the state. It not only looks good for the agency but it also looks good for you . . . sounds like you are trying to get the 'Conservation Officer of the Year Award.' "

Helping an employee determine his goals is also important (Ackerman and Grunenwald 1984). When a person sets his goals he should live by them. They are a commitment to the organization (Walton 1985). Goals not only allow a person to know what is expected of him but they also make an employee's work more challenging. This gives the person a sense of security and responsibility.

Good training is also important (Goodson 1968). If an employee feels as if he knows the job, he will feel more secure and will be more productive.

Try to give employees raises as high as you can and as often as you can if they perform well (Caruth and Noe 1984). This shows that you are "looking out for them." This is very difficult in the public sector since money is scarce. A technique an administrator once used to get more money for his employees was when asking the legislature for a Conservation Officer (CO) position, he always asked for a CO III not a I. When he hired the CO, he moved a II to a III, moved a I to a II, and hired the new CO as a I.

Also, show an employee that you are interested in him and that you care about him and his family (Garrison 1980; Caruth and Noe 1985). If a person continually does a good job, do you stab him in the back? Of course not! Ask about his family and children. If he is sick, call or go by and see him or at least send a card. If someone in his family dies, send some flowers.

Another very important idea is recognition. When an employee learns that higher performance yields recognition, he will be more productive (Cherrington and Wixom 1983). For example, a CO for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation won the new "Conservation Officer of the Year" award 2 years ago. His productivity increased as well as the agency's. He won the award again last year.

Another motivational technique is to get on a first name basis with co-workers. Also, get on their level. This eases tension. By level, I mean talk or write to him by not using complex words that may confuse or embarrass him.

One should also solicit the opinions of subordinates. Encourage them to aid in decision making process. This makes them feel wanted and almost assures acceptance of the decision by field personnel (Garrison 1980).

Good equipment is a must. One of the main demotivators is poor equipment (Goodson 1968). If an employee has good equipment (whether it is quality clothing, a four-wheel drive, the proper size boat, or a bullet-proof vest), he will be more comfortable about doing the job.

The last motivating technique discusses positive attitudes. Supervisors at every level should keep a positive attitude about things. Positive remarks motivate people (Goetze 1981), and if an organization thinks positive, productivity should be high (Garrison 1980).

This is just a brief overview of some of the techniques used to motivate loosely supervised employees. If millions of dollars are spent on law enforcement, management, and research, shouldn't we also take the time to use these techniques in order to get the most out of our employees? In the future, this means that we will get the most out of our wildlife resources.

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