



Motivating Creative Talent barb wooley

I'm the Designer Director at Hambly & Woolley and Bob, who is my husband, is the Creative Director of our firm. When we were asked to do this, we were really excited about the opportunity to speak to you about this. But it became difficult when we started to think about it because there are so many different kinds of motivation. And each kind of motivation speaks to an individual personally and so there isn't really one pass for the masses. We started doing some research. We polled our office to see what motivates or staff. We have things that we do in our office that we feel work. There's a whole study of this in behavioral science, and we're not psychologists but we are here to give you a few tidbits of what we have been doing in our office and some other examples that might help.

I told Barb that between parking the car and coming here, I recalled one of the best, silliest motivational things I ever encountered. Maybe I can start off with that. When I was a kid in high school, our family owned a Coca Cola bottling franchise. My father, who had a military background, ran the business very well. He paid attention to what Japanese businesses were doing in America and used ideas as he found them. But one idea he had was very bad. At the end of each day, staff at the franchise had to bring in all the distribution trucks, clean them and load them with cola for the next day because everything was pre-sold for the next day. This was a massive amount of work that had to be done at the end of the day. My dad had a great idea. He put speakers outside and he played military band music because that's what motivated him. That's what inspired him. Most days I left to go home with my dad, but I knew that as soon as we left the plant in my dad's red Coca Cola car, the old band music went off and the headbanging music went on and the staff loaded those trucks, and those trucks were perfect. That was what motivated them. And my dad came back in the morning and everything was great.

Me and Barb would like to tell you how you to motivate creative people. There is no simple answer. We thought it might be helpful for us to understand what you do a little bit better. How many of you are either partners or firm owners? People who are employees of design firms? And how many people are self-employed? I think what we have to present addresses each and every one of you. We're hoping that we'll have time for questions, and we'll see if you agree to disagree.

What is motivation? It's an internal state or condition sometimes described as the need, desire or want that serves to activate or energize behaviour and direction. Really motivation has a lot to do with goals and consequences. If you know that you have something to do and there's a good indication you can get it done, that's kind of motivating. Motivation, in part, comes down to understanding that there is a probability for success. If you don't think you can achieve something, it's not very likely you will try to. One way to get around this is to create benchmark levels that are within your expectations so you know you can accomplish each benchmark.

You also have to understand people's motives. Particularly as a firm owner, you have to motivate people. You have to realize that each person will respond to something different too. We are all individuals. You have to understand the connection between success and reward. What's in it for me? What will happen at the end? What is the value of reaching the goal? When am I going to get out of this at the end. Will it make me learn something? Will I feel good about it?

We have a couple of quotes to start us off.

"Bribing creative people just won't work."

Peter Drucker, business management guru

Drucker is one of the foremost business thinkers of our time. He is using his practical business thinking to understand nonprofit situations, so that people can learn from his examples. Really there is no way to bribe creative people to do work. That's really the first thing to understand.

"The commitment of creative people is highly contingent, and their motivation comes largely from within."

Richard Florida, author

So that talks about you, as a person. What you are. What you're made up of. Your innate qualities. Richard Florida is the author of a book that we're really excited about, which will talk about at the end. It is really good news for all of us, as creative people. The huge value that has been created in economy has been created by us, as the creative class. We found that quote to be quite important, because a lot of this does come from within us.

We developed a little chart. Let me see if I can walk you through it. In the middle, where it says intrinsic, that represents each one of us, as individuals. A lot of our motivation is intrinsic. It's just there. Why? We could spend forever trying to figure that out. Is it genetic? Is it your upbringing? What is it? This is something we can't talk about too much. It's the things on the outside that we think we can help you with.

The next ring is intangible. Things that are affecting you. They may not be things that you can put your hands on, but they're really important. And after doing this, Barb and I feel that the three things that are the most important are: respect, empowerment and flexibility.

On the outer ring are the tangible things - the things that we can all do that affect all of us, such as encouragement, leadership, environment, compensation, challenges, recognition, influences and fun.

It's interesting that when you first ask us someone what motivates them, they might say, "Well naturally it would be money". I think, generally with creative people, that is not the most important factor. For creative people, challenges are cited as number one.

Let's talk about intrinsic and extrinsic forces. Intrinsic qualities have to do with the fact that most of the motivation to do anything will come from you. Motives are the whys of behaviour. Why do I need to be this? People differ not only in their ability to do but also in their will to do. That goes back to the individuality aspect. Intrinsic is stuff that you can control or you can learn about how to control. You're born with it. It gets wrapped up with self-esteem, your goals, your drive, what kind of responsibility you bear, your values and your opportunity for self-actualization. Extrinsic - these are the things that we'll talk about primarily - are the things that we can all do or be aware of to change to modify behaviour. These are external factors. There are lots of factors: a deadline or some type of implication. Both positive and negative factors can be motivators. People can be motivated differently and factors can be tangible and intangible.

Let's start with the tangible factors - the things we can actually put our finger on, the things that affect all of us whether we know it or not. The intangibles we'll come to later. They may be far more important because they're not so obvious. But let's go into tangibles.

Money. As I said, this may be the first thing you might think of as a motivator but really it's not. There are really many other more important reasons that people are motivated, but we still need to address this one. Salary is important to creative people. They want to feel as though they are getting fair money, that there is value created by the work they are doing for the company that they are working for. It's the first layer or the foundation of anyone's relationship with a client or employee. But, at some point, there has to be a limit on how much you can pay. So how else can you give employees compensation? You can talk about benefits. Rather than just strict dental and drug coverage, there are lots of other things that you can look into. In our company we have worked out a plan where you can have massage, acupuncture, physiotherapy, psychologists, dietitians. All this goes towards the wellness of the people that work with you and for you.

As well, there is stature. There are opportunities for people within your organization to grow, and to benefit from that growth within your company. They're adding value so you may want to give them opportunities over time to earn or be invited to be partners or associates within the company. Titles are not necessarily motivating in themselves. They have to be meaningful, obviously. But that certainly is a way for someone to feel better compensated. Most of us aren't party to any of the stuff that is available within larger institutions such as shares and employee options so we have to do it our way. As I said, there should be opportunities for growth - knowing when someone comes in, there is potentially a place that they can move to.

If someone is interested in the company, they don't want to feel that they're going to the left at 'tier 1' always. Obviously we have junior, intermediate and senior designers but I think that to know that there is a way for your employees to learn and grow within the organization can be incredibly motivating.

Environment. I particularly like this one. The environment we work in is incredibly important. We do a fair amount of work for interior designers and people in the furniture world. And the importance of the work environment, because of people our age, and people like us who are creative, has really changed immensely in the last little while. First of all is the location. Here in Toronto it seems we are all pooled in one area. There's a reason for that. The spaces are interesting. It is proven that people like relatively raw spaces. They like tall ceilings. They like good light. We prefer spaces where we have our individual space on the outside of our office, communal space on the inside. We tend to like bright colors. We worked with an interior designer who had access to a study that was done in United States. It was really quite amazing how much this influences peoples decision to work at one place over another. Within the environment, the locations of people are important? How visible are the people? Where are those people? Because most of us sit behind the computer, we are often confined to one area. Does the space encourage you to all come together? Do you have the means by which to bring people together? When you do come together, does that space invite you to talk and do things other than design? That gets into the culture. What have you done to encourage people? I think, as creative people, you love to talk about what it is you are doing but you also like to talk about what you saw last night or what you found on the way to work or who you met were or what you just saw on the web. Does your company environment really allow that culture to foster itself and encourage that kind of conduct.

Resources. Do you have the resources by which to accomplish what you want, in your office? You still have to send your colour out and wait for that to come back? What is the level of your computer equipment? Do you have other kinds of equipment that maybe pull you away from your computer? Do you have digital cameras for people to fool around what? Do you have other things that would help people to experiment? We had a co-op student come and spend some time with us this summer. The same student worked with three different studios this summer, and the feedback we got back from the student was that the experience with us was very enjoyable and a lot of it had to do with the environment.

One of the things that people respond to is a clean, orderly office. You can find your work. You know where stuff goes. It's not chaos. A lot of those subtle messages can get forgotten about. Clients picked up on it when they're in the office. How clear is your thinking? I think that Bob perhaps takes it a little to an extreme. It's having a father with a military background, I guess. When anyone goes into Bob office they ask, "Does he even works here?" Because there is no paper on the desk. He's often throwing things out that we need but he can't help himself. There is a limit to the cleanliness of the creative office.

Challenges. Challenges are the number one reason that creative people get excited and motivated. Challenges can be about things you set for yourself or your outside extreme forces set for you. Interesting work is one of the most important factors. Think of the YMCA annual report. Probably everyone is familiar with this. It is a project that designers get excited about doing because they have latitude and freedom to create something of their own, their own voice. It doesn't pay market value but there are a lot of decisions that people can make about what is important to take on as a work or not. Are there opportunities for learning? Is there an opportunity for someone who is particularly interested in something to do that kind of work in our office? We have done work with two OHL hockey franchises, just because a couple of guys in the office are passionate about hockey. I think if the work is interesting, it's really worth taking on and you can make the evaluations about money secondarily.

Deadlines are important to think about. Challenges of getting work done on time. Obviously we didn't want to not say it, but that is a very self-evident motivator.

Company and personal goals. Through discussions with the people who work with you, you can identify what is going to make them stay with you. Remember it is much easier to keep people than to continue to hire new people. Try to engage them. Find out what their interests are. You have to try to delve into them. In Richard Florida's book, he explains that researchers are leaving labs in order to be able to put their research into practice, to actually see that it has results. That's another huge motivating factor. Find the things that get people excited and interested and try to cultivate those things. Say no to crap! You want people to be happy with the work they are doing and sometimes you just have to say no, this is not, on any level, work that is worth having are doing.

Recognition. We all love to be recognized for what we do. We like to be recognized by our peer groups. It's my task within our company to make sure that we enter different award shows. It's amazing the number that are out there and they're expensive. Find the ones that are meaningful to you. Not only is it important to you as a company that your work is out there and to let people see it. It is important for the people who work for you that their work is out there representing you and that they get credit for it.

You want your work to make a difference, and you want to hear about the results. You want to know that you spent all this time and effort. Knowing that it has an impact. We do work for Harry magazine. There are 90,000 copies printed in English and 5,000 in French. They go out directly to people who shop at Harry Rosen depending on how much money they spend. They polled people last year and 98% of the people who receive that magazine read it. The salespeople in the store tell us that a lot of men and women, but mostly men, bring the magazine with them and say I want this, turn the page, and I want this. When we heard that the thing that you labour and have so much fun producing, is read by 98% of the people who receive it and they are bringing it to the store, it makes you feel really good that you have accomplished what your client had set out for you.

Meritocracy, Barb and I stumbled upon this word a while ago through a good friend. When we realized what it meant, we realized that we were a meritocracy. We do not base our office on seniority. If you have worked somewhere five years than you move up. Or, if you've been somewhere ten years you get a Cadillac. We're creative people and we grow at different rates. We can bring different talents to a company. We should all be rewarded for that. We have a female designer right now one year out of OCAD. Within one year, she is winning awards for us; she is meeting clients; she is taking projects from start to finish. She is an incredibly confident, good designer. She will go far because that's the way she is progressing. Knowing what you do matters. Don't forget that you are in a position to tell your employees that they're doing a good job, or that's great. If you mean it. You have to mean it. There's nothing worse than it being hollow. A simple, wow that looks great. That can make the biggest difference in the world. You don't have to give me time off or more money, just tell me that this is good. The reason Barb and I put a lot of weight behind this is because unfortunately we have clients who don't do that. We have clients who expect that what we're going to do is good. So they never talk about it being good. They just talk about the negative. It is so difficult to sit there and hear the negative over and over again. If they could just once slip in, "Boy, you did a good job." You don't know how much weight that carries. Recognition. We touched upon this earlier - opportunities for advancement. When you do things well, and you prove that you fit in and you belong and you're passionate. What better way to recognize you than by advancing you or giving you more responsibility?

Credit. We strongly believe that when you submit work, when our work is out there, when we are showing our work to a client, that A) we're recognized as a company, but B) the individuals who have worked on it get recognized. Our company has been in business for 12 years. We truly have taken on the roles of Design Director and Creative Director. We're depending more and more on our designers to create the work. Barb and I could just not pretend that it is our work. That's wrong; that's bad. It's important to put the people forward who did the work.

Leadership. This is a really important one. It is lead by example. One of the main factors that people cited in our office in our little, informal poll was that the standards and values of the people in charge are very important. And they want to know what you stand for as a company and individually. So when someone asks you to do certain kinds of work for instance, that maybe you don't want to do or you just don't feel is ethical, they are willing to say no, and not take on every job. Or, for instance, someone who is starting to art direct you to death on the other side, a client, and you're willing to say I don't think I'm going to do that. It takes a little bit of backbone. They are nice ways of going about it, but it's important to be able to stand up and show by example what you are made of as a creative person. Ethics, as I mentioned, are important. This opens up a whole can of worms of spec work. I know there are a lot of articles that have been written and are being written about this subject. As an R.G.D., we just don't do it. Our code of ethics is important to our work. Not only do we not do it, but I can think of two or three example that where we have convinced people who have come to us not only that it is

wrong, here's the way that we recommend you go about doing it. And they have changed the way they go about doing it.

Mentoring. I think there is a responsibility on the part of the people who are trying to motivate people to share your knowledge, share your time. It's easy to get wrapped up - I have to get it done. There is a deadline. Don't talk to me. I have too much to do. The only way that you are going to get people to come along with you is if you share what you have with them. That can be both internal and external. Part of the reason I feel that we even had to do this talk, because believe me this is not what we like to do, was because I feel it is important to come out into the community, and give something back. And hopefully offer something to somebody. I think that you have to be able to listen to people and work with them no matter what level they're at or what stage they're at in their careers.

Support. It is really important to be able to go into a client presentation with work that you feel personally proud of them and you can defend. When you show your designers or the people that are working with you that you are one hundred percent behind their work, that is a great motivator.

Encouragement. It's pretty self-explanatory. In giving feedback to somebody, and this is a learned art, it is very easy to cite something when it is a problem. But how do you help someone fix that problem. You have to be positive. You have to position things in a positive light. I've learned to be better at that by watching Barb. Barb is a master at it. She finds one thing that is a glimmer. A good example is identities. We do a lot of identities. Not all designers love identities. The designers who are new to them or don't love them struggle. And I've watched Barb find that one thing, that one sketch that is on the right track and focus on that. And put all of her emphasis there. This is it. This is great. Push this. And we will give constructive criticism to the things that aren't so good but won't belabour them. Patient, you know that different people working different rates, at different speeds. They have different aesthetics and different sensibilities. You have to understand each one your designers, be patient with them. Understand their process. In our office, at the moment, we have some people who take a long time, we have some people who are incredibly fast. We have to be able to go with the flow. I think that touches on understanding too. You really have to understand.

Barb just pointed to the word ego. Let's face it. We all have egos. That's what creative people do. Some people have them in a little better check than others. But we really like to hear that we have done a good job. Some of us need to hear it louder and more often than others, but we like to hear that. Whether it's from your peers - and my guess is that from your peers is probably the most meaningful - from your employers or those people who are senior, you love to hear that. And I particularly like to hear it from a client, from a person who has hired you and it's done, and it's out there and it's working. To hear that it has done its job.

I think it's also just understanding the individual. Different types of motivation click with different kinds of people. And it is your job to understand what it is that motivates people and how to handle them, how to work with them.

Influences. This is pretty obvious. All of us have sponges for brains where all kinds of outside forces and media can influence your work and should influence your work. When you go to look at literal things that can be in your office. Magazine subscriptions, buying books, having music, going to see visual arts and performing arts – all of these things can inspire. Obviously television, movies and the web are hugely important these days. People do gather and talk about trends and what was on last night and what's going on with The Osbornes. Topical issues can be important. Sharing that information. When people cluster in the middle of our office and talk about what's going on, it can be really inciting. Some people will be lending books to each other, or lending music to each other. And they can try to each understand that person better as well. And a lot of people have been turned on to different things just because they had a glimpse into a world that they didn't know anything about. Personal interests and hobbies - those types of things can be brought to bear on your work. Friends, mentors and peers will also do that. You might actually want to make your own list of what does motivate you. What kinds of thing do that? When you start to look at your work, certain things will pop up that you didn't even realize were there. Something that I'm always getting grief over at the office is that I always try to make everything into a face. I was really happy to get the Knoll book, the paper promo with all the photographs of the face because I had been doing this for a long time. And had been cataloging different faces in object or in real situations. I like laughing and looking at situations like that, and now our daughter is actually doing the same kind of thing. I think there are lots of thing that can be brought to bear on your work.

Fun. We couldn't come up with a better title for this. I just wanted to touch upon some of the things that we do in our office - very personal things. They help us, whether they help you, I don't know. Every Friday in our office is a doughnut day. And make sure you bring good doughnuts. If you bring crap doughnuts, you will be ridiculed. Every year we have a scavenger hunt. We take the day off, and we make up a list, divide into teams, and try to find the most bizarre things – ugliest t-shirt, a used black comb. We give them a budget - \$20. We get together afterwards at a bar and we go down the list and each team presents what they have found, and we give a rating, as a group and then we go through all the items. Then, as a group, we decide which team wins and they get the grand prize. We have had people ask, “Do you do these things as team building exercises?” No, we don't. We do these things as a release, to just get out of the office. To do something different. We've gone bowling. When we went bowling, you had to show up with the ugliest shirt and there was a prize for the ugliest shirt. We've gone rock climbing, skiing and snowboarding. When there's a birthday we take everyone out to lunch to celebrate that person's birthday. Whenever we win money for an award, we are sure that we do something as a group. Usually we go to dinner. We go to the theatre. Just things that we know will be stimulating and we can do together. Two years ago we had our 10th anniversary and we took everyone to New York City. It wasn't really as expensive as you would think.

We've got a dog in the office. It's Gord's dog; they're inseparable. When Gord goes to the washroom, the dog walks to the door and sits by the door and waits until Gord comes out. The dog is interesting. When new clients come to the office, by and large, they love it, because it says that we are approachable, homey. We've had a couple people who do not like the dog. It's a very well-behaved dog, so he will just go away. We love the dog. And the dog has made most people feel relaxed.

We have a bonehead award. For people who make the stupidest mistakes. Bob has more bonehead awards than anybody. We have gold, silver and bronze. Bob, one day, was sitting on the edge of his desk talking to a client on the phone, talking endlessly, and I came in and was trying to get his attention and tell him to stop but he kept ignoring me, shoeing me away. I was actually trying to get his attention because he had sat on the phone and disconnected the client. The client was on the other line but Bob continued to talk to himself for almost a minute. The bonehead award is always meant in good humour. If something screws up and you have to reprint a job that doesn't get a bonehead award.

Flexibility. This is one of the things that might be slightly intangible. This are, as we said, important to recognize. We're lucky in this world that we work in that we can be spontaneous because it releases some tension. We don't have a really strict bureaucracy or processes, which is good for people. They feel free to create and do fun work. As I said, people are individuals and understanding what makes someone tick is important. If somebody needs headbanging music, I certainly encourage them to get headsets, but certainly there's no rules. I know one of the places I worked I was told that I couldn't have a coloured set square. It had to be a certain shade of white. It was mystifying to me. Be open to new ideas. Again, there are a lot of people working for you that will have a different point of view and will bring some of these outside influences that we talked about to projects. You need to be receptive and open, and perhaps not be encouraging of every single idea, but certainly know how to channel them.

Adapt to your role. Find out what you can be, and make a job yours. This is particularly if you are working with an environment, doing design, really its applies to many different kinds of discipline, make it yours and take ownership of it. Provide time to think. People in our office felt that because we're not saying you have four hours to do this logo, because of budget, they felt that they had time to go home and think about it in the shower or work on it intermittently along the way. Let them find a little thing that helped them get to the solution. Given time to work on it. Our philosophy again is that the budget is not the driving force. You want to do the best job within the parameters that you have. Given time to think; give them time to surf.

Empowerment. Barb likes the term self-actualization. Give people that power to be their best, to do what they want to do. Make sure that their input is valued. When they come to present their work to you, or to a group, give them time to explain it, to show it. That process for a lot of people will take a little bit of time. Some people are shy about it; other people dominate. But people need to defend what it is they're doing. I think that it's important that people feel that they can contribute that way and that it's not just our direction. We all need our autonomy.

You need time to be able to be on your own, in your own space to work on it, without people breathing down your neck, constantly wondering where it's at.

You get to learn how different designers work and understand what they're going to need, what it takes, and let them do it. And a sense of belonging, in that they feel comfortable in that environment, they're encouraged and they are part of things. Sometimes we notice that people tend to stay in front of their computers. They don't get involved. That's okay. We don't want to force people to get involved more than they want to. But you have to make sure that everybody feels part of the office, part of the culture. We try to help each other out. There is no hierarchical standards where we are not going to cut out the laser output for presentation. I think Bob is our best mockup guy. He's out there spray mounting and cutting out layouts and mounting things because it just needs to get done. There just isn't a job that is too good for us.

Respect. For us probably the most important thing. It is the major motivator to a lot of people. Giving people the freedom to do what they do. Trust that they are going to be able to do the job and people will support the work that you do. As an employer, trusting that they are going to get the job done and trusting that they know what they're doing is critical. Give them feedback. Spend the time to give them feedback and bring them along. Understand them. Show them empathy. These individuals are really what make up this creative group. So share your time. I think that feedback also means, listen to their feedback. Listen to how they're reacting to what's going on. You have to respect their opinion.

Finally, while we were doing all of this research, we came across several quotes. We pared it down to one we really liked.

"Expect poison from standing water."

William Blake

If you're just going to sit back and hope that all this stuff is going to just happen, then expect poison. You are going to have to work at it. Whether you work on your own or you are an employer or employee, you have to think about this kind of stuff and work at it constantly.

And who better to end with than the chairman himself.

"Drift. Allow yourself to wander aimlessly. Explore adjacencies. Lack judgement."

Bruce Mau.

That's kind of a bold thing to say, but Barb and I both really like that. We're not in the business to become formulated about the way we approach things. That's a check that we should all do from time to time. Once we become connected to the standard way about which you go about solving the problem, then you're in trouble. You have to always have to come at things from a different perspective, a different angle. Push yourself. Someone once said to me, and I totally believe it, "There is no such thing as a bad idea." Don't be afraid to fall flat on your face because sometimes interesting things come out of it.