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# The Effects of Motivational Strategies to Increase Teachers' Commitment and Enthusiasm

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# The Effects of Motivational Strategies to Increase Teachers' Commitment and Enthusiasm

An Action Research Report  
By Donna Fiumara

Running head: TEACHER MOTIVATION

The Effects of Motivational Strategies to Increase  
Teachers' Commitment and Enthusiasm

Submitted on December 5, 2015

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## TEACHER MOTIVATION

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore motivational strategies that can be used to increase faculty and staff's motivation in a small private Montessori school, located in New Jersey. Ten members of the faculty and staff participated in this action research project over the course of six weeks. Pre-data collection included an online motivational quiz that identified each faculty and staff member's top three motivators. Short term goals were created by the participant with the administrator in a pre-conference based on the motivator results of each individual's pre-test. The administrator used the motivational strategies of each faculty and staff member throughout the research to support them on their short term goal. Data was collected on each faculty and staff member through a weekly conference and reflection journal, as well as a daily job expectation and negative talk tally. The results of this action research suggest that using individual motivators for each faculty and staff member increase employee motivation and enthusiasm in the workplace. The action research project was done at the beginning of the school year when the faculty and staff are the most enthusiastic and motivated. I would like to continue my research throughout the school year, analyzing any significant changes in the data.

What motivates you in the workplace? Do you feel satisfied when you accomplish a task and look for new challenges and goals to meet? Do you look for incentives and opportunities at work to gain money and status? The research has shown that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational forces are different for each person. Over the last few years, I have observed that the faculty and staff at the school I direct have a decrease in motivation, commitment and enthusiasm in the workplace. The faculty and staff have shown negative behavior, and their job performance has been average at best. Incentives for time off and paid continued education classes have not been well received. I believe it is important for an administrator to find out which motivators each employee requires to have them feel satisfied and enthusiastic in the workplace. I feel it is extremely important for administrators to use these motivators while managing each employee and when setting up individual goals. I believe this strategy will promote maximum job performance and stimulate positive behavior and enthusiasm in the workplace. This action research project will present research on different motivational strategies and show what effects these strategies have on increasing faculty/staff commitment and enthusiasm in the workplace.

My action research took place in a private Montessori school that enrolls children from 18 months through thirteen years of age. Ten of my faculty/staff members agreed to participate in this action research project. The faculty and staff consist of all women who have worked in the school from one to eighteen years. The action research project took place over a six-week period, starting at the beginning of the school year.

### **Review of Literature**

Decades of Gallup research into human behaviors and strengths have found that people who use their strengths every day are six times more likely to be motivated on the job (Sorenson, 2014). This research has established a compelling connection between strengths and employee motivation in the workplace (Sorenson, 2014). According to Lopez and Sidhu (2013), raising teachers' workplace engagement is critical because their engagement is the major force for student engagement which in turn affects student wellbeing and academic success.

Kroth (as cited in Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009) defined motivation as the influence that causes an individual to act in a certain manner and has been described as being made up of energy, direction and sustainability. Motivation is to be moved to do something. No impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). According to Ryan and Deci, people not only have different amounts of motivation but also different kinds of motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000a) have defined intrinsic motivation as doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, while extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. This section will examine the effects teacher empowerment has on increasing motivation in the workplace.

### **Teacher Empowerment**

Teacher empowerment increases motivation in a school environment. According to Bogler and Nir (2012), there is much evidence in the professional literature advocating the importance of employee satisfaction affecting professional behavior. If an employee

is happy and satisfied in the workplace will they in turn perform at a higher standard? A study was done by Bogler and Nir (2012), to investigate the mediating effect of teacher empowerment on the relationship between teachers' perception of their school support and their intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. A sample was taken from 2,565 elementary teachers. The results demonstrated that the most influential dimension of empowerment in teacher intrinsic motivation is self-efficacy, while the most powerful dimension of extrinsic motivation is earned status and respect. Similar to Bogler and Nir, the research of Emmerik, Schreurs, Cuyper, Jawahar, and Peeters (2011), also examined resources (i.e., feedback, autonomy, and variety), and the role that they play in employee motivation. The findings showed that the resources were both related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and that the association between resources and employability was mediated by only extrinsic motivation. These studies show that both intrinsic and extrinsic forces effected teacher empowerment in the workplace. Leadership in the workplace is another important factor effecting motivation and empowerment in a school environment.

### **Leadership can effect empowerment**

Leadership affects motivation and empowerment in the workplace. Davis and Wilson, (2000), have theorized that leadership plays an important role in creating an empowering environment by examining the literature. Davis and Wilson (2000) examined the literature and cite that according to Vogt and Murrell, leaders can nurture intrinsic motivators by encouraging and establishing relationships that are positive. Leaders need to facilitate decision making that enhances both personal and organizational growth. If a leader nurtures intrinsic motivation in the work place it may minimize

negative outcomes that are associated with shared decision making. Davis and Wilson (2000) use the Thomas and Velthouse cognitive model for intrinsic empowerment (as cited in Davis & Wilson, 2000), for their study. This model shows the basis for worker empowerment being: sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness, and choice. The study involves these cognitive factors when mediating elementary teachers' expectations and motivations for their behaviors. The findings of this study revealed a significant relationship between Principal Empowerment Behaviors (PEB) and teacher motivation. The more principals engaged in empowering behaviors, the greater the impact was on teacher motivation.

Eyal and Roth (2011) like Davis and Wilson (2000), studied the effects of principal leadership and teacher motivation. The study of Eyal and Roth (2011) discusses transformational leadership (i.e., charismatic leadership) and transactional leadership. Yukl (as cited in Eyal & Roth, 2011), defines transformational leadership as one that inspires individuals to exceed their expected behavior. This type of leadership motivates followers to identify with the leader and develop goals and visions (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Avolio et al. (as cited in Eyal & Roth, 2011) claimed that transformational leadership involves four main leadership behaviors: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. In contrast, transactional leadership is based on incentives or rewards for compliance. The results of Eyal and Roth's study (2011) showed a significant negative correlation between transformational leadership and burnout, whereas a significant positive correlation emerged between transactional leadership and burnout.



Choi also studied the effects that leadership plays in employee motivation.

According to Choi (2006), the motivational effects of charismatic leadership are derived from three core components: envisioning; empathy; and empowerment. The behaviors of a charismatic leader promote clearer role perceptions, improved task performance, greater job satisfaction, stronger collective identity and group cohesiveness, more organizational citizenship behaviors, and stronger self-leadership among the followers (Choi, 2006).

According to Choi (2006), few motivational theories on charismatic leadership have been proposed explaining how it affects followers' needs. The core features of charismatic leadership have been explained differently by different scholars and have hindered researchers in examining the effects of the followers' needs (Choi, 2006).

### **Motivational Theories**

There are many theories surrounding the topic of motivation. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory holds that human behavior is motivated by unsatisfied needs: physiological; safety; belongingness; self-esteem; and self actualization. Lower-level needs (i.e., physiological) must be satisfied before the higher-level needs (i.e., psychological) can be addressed (Hayhoe, 2004). Some have questioned if the process which people proceed through Maslow's hierarchy of needs is practical and realistic (Gordon Rouse, 2004). Research has failed to find evidence that individuals progress through the hierarch of needs meeting the lower level needs before satisfying the higher level (O'Connor & Yballe, 2007). Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory explains that a person's disposition or attitude effects their motivation. Herzberg distinguishes people into motivational seekers and hygiene seekers based on their individual attitudes at work (Joo, Lee, & Jung, 1996). According to Joo, Lee & Jung (1996), motivation seekers find

accomplishment, recognition, responsibility and development at work satisfying while hygiene seekers work for money, position, working conditions and supervision. A study was done to analyze the effects of a reward policy. The findings of this study indicate that it is important to consider a teacher's background and attitude because of the individual characteristics, beliefs and needs of each staff member in order to increase motivation (Joo, Lee, & Jung, 1996). According to Bassett-Jones & Lloyd (2005), Herzberg's results have shown that money is a hygiene factor and does not motivate. According to Herzberg, motivation is like an internal battery; it comes from within. The research findings of Bassett-Jones & Lloyd (2005), demonstrated that motivators linked to intrinsic forces outweigh forces linked to financial, recognition or extrinsic rewards. It was also established that poor supervisory relationships discourage employees' willingness to contribute.

Self-determination theory is a motivational approach that employs traditional observation methods while utilizing natural and innate resources to develop personality traits and behavioral self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Self-determination theory proposes that individuals have three innate needs. These needs are competence, relatedness (belonging) and autonomy (Anderman & Leake, 2005). A self-determination theory study, done by Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci (2006), found activities achieved through intrinsic versus extrinsic goals, promote a deeper understanding of the content. Individuals are believed to naturally focus on intrinsic growth or rewards rather than extrinsic oriented goals. Intrinsic goals are theorized to be linked to satisfy the innate needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2006).

To show the effectiveness of intervention programs designed to support autonomy, a meta-analysis was performed by Su & Reeve (2011). Their research indicated that intervention programs can be effective. Training teachers to be more autonomy-supported created environments where teachers were the most highly motivated. In most autonomy-supportive training intervention programs, the unit of analysis is the individual supervisor (Su & Reeve, 2011). A 40 year meta-study done by Cerasoli, Nicklin & Ford (2014), looked at intrinsic and extrinsic incentives jointly. This study concluded that 40 years of data proved that intrinsic motivation remains a moderate predictor of performance even when extrinsic incentives are present. Incentives coexist with intrinsic motivation depending on the individual performance and extrinsic reward (Cerasoli et al., 2014).

Motivation in the workplace has the power to accelerate performance (Sorenson, 2014). The literature reviewed has shown that there are various methods and theories used to learn about staff motivation. Based upon the literature, the Action Researcher agrees with Martin (2009) who claims that there is no one motivational theory widely accepted in an organization or workplace. Many theories share familiar variables that determine an individual's motivation. Understanding each individual staff member's needs and goals would enable principals or managers to support that individual's motivation. Self-determination theory will be this study's area of focus. Determining each teacher or staff member's top three motivators will enable an understanding of each individual's needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

### **Description of Research Process**

The implementation of the motivation and behavior strategies for my action research project took place over the course of a six-week period, starting in September and ending in October 2015. The process began immediately upon the return of the faculty and staff, from summer break. After explaining the action research project to the faculty and staff, they all agreed to participate. There are ten faculty and staff members participating in this action research study.

My data collection procedures were done using the following methods: (1) a 10-minute online motivational assessment; (2) a 20-minute pre-conference with each faculty and staff member; (3) a weekly reflective journal that is filled out by the faculty or staff member; (4) a 20-minute weekly conference with each faculty and staff member; (5) tally sheets reflecting negative talk; (6) tally sheets reflecting if a faculty or staff member exceeded or did not meet their job responsibilities.

Before my research began, each faculty and staff member was asked to take an online motivational assessment (Appendix A) that would identify each staff or faculty's top three motivators. They were asked to print it out and bring it with them to our pre-conference appointment. I used the results from the motivation test as a baseline for my research. The results I received were the basis for supporting each faculty and staff member in the best way for them to feel motivated and supported.

During the week of teacher training and classroom preparation, all faculty and staff made a 20-minute appointment to meet with me for a pre-conference (Appendix B). The intention of the pre-conference was to discuss a short term goal that the faculty or staff member wanted to work on over the six week period of my action research project. The

intention of the short term goal is to support individual growth. We discussed the staff or faculty's top three motivators in great detail, and an appointment was set up for the following week. After reviewing the staff or faculty member's short-term goals, it was my job to use their top three motivators to support them in obtaining their goal. Finding a way to support the faculty or staff member's short-term goal, using their top three motivators, was not an easy task. It took much thought and reflection to make the connection.

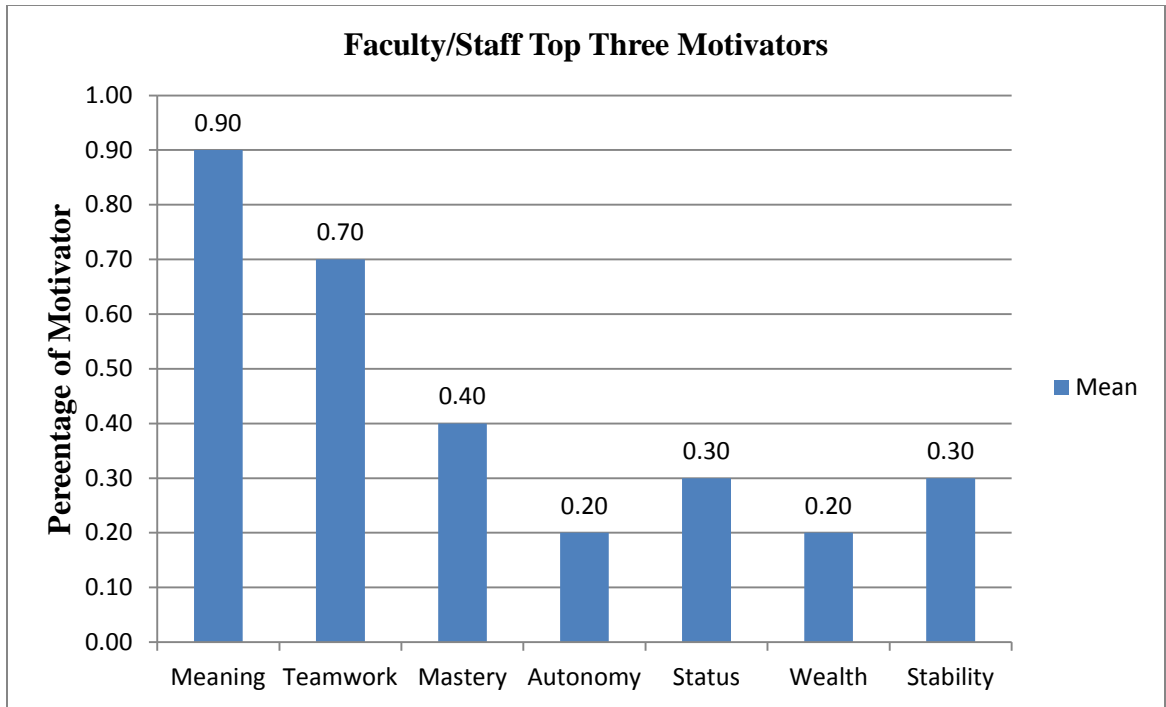
At the end of each week, I had a conference with every faculty and staff member. They were asked to bring to the meeting their reflective journal completed (Appendix C). This short 10-minute reflective journal allowed the faculty or staff member to reflect on positive and negative experiences of that week. It allowed them to communicate if they felt supported by another faculty member, staff or administrator. After reviewing the reflective journal with them, I was able to understand and support each faculty and staff's needs and successes at a personal level. The faculty or staff member and I discussed the progress of their short term goal (Appendix D) and if they felt or needed more support. We made an appointment for the following week.

My Assistant Administrator used tallies (Appendix E) to document negative talk in the kitchen also known as the common area. The faculty or staff was fully aware of this observation. Negative talk was observed by the faculty or staff for 30 minutes in the morning before the children arrived, 60 minutes during the faculty and staff's lunch period, and 30 minutes at the end of each day after dismissal. The Assistant Administrator did not document any faculty or staff members' names during this observation.

The final source of data collection was a staff expectation tally (Appendix F). I utilized approximately 15 minutes a day tallying if a faculty or staff member exceeded or did not meet their job requirements for the day. I also included an area to note any special circumstance that could have affected the data collection, (i.e., a sick staff member). The collection obtained from the staff expectation tally allows me to observe if a faculty or staff member is communicating their need for additional support, and it is also a way to open a dialogue as to why individual job requirements are not being done. It is important for me to see what faculty or staff is doing above and beyond in the workplace.

### **Analysis of Data**

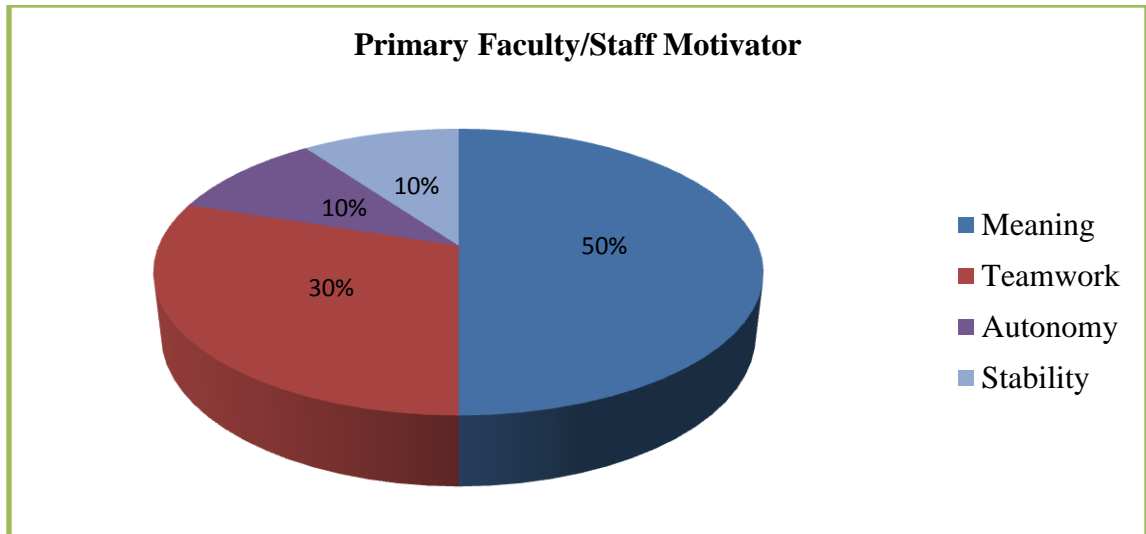
The data I collected during the action research project consisted of information gathered from my faculty and staff members. Before beginning my action research, it was important for me to get a baseline of the faculty and staff's top motivators. To do this, the faculty and staff took a ten minute online motivational quiz (Appendix A) to determine their top three motivators. The faculty and staff printed the quiz analysis and brought these findings to the pre-conference, where they would set up a six week short-term goal.



*Figure 1.* Top Three Motivators. This graph shows the mean for the 10 faculty and staff member's individual top three motivators, determined by the online motivational quiz.

Figure 1 shows that *meaning* was the top motivator at 90% among the population followed by *teamwork* at 70%, whereas *wealth* and *autonomy* shared last place at 20%. *Stability* and *status* were shared at 30%. *Mastery* was reported at 40%.

When analyzing only the top motivator for each member of the population see *Figure 2*, the results showed that *meaning* was the top motivator in 50% of the population, followed by *teamwork* at 30%. Only two members of the population chose *stability* and *autonomy* as a top motivator.



The faculty/staff member's individual motivators were analyzed and used to support each member of the population's short-term goal for six weeks. These motivators were discussed in detail at the pre-conference. The population's six week goals were categorized into five main areas: personal growth, health and wellness, organization, communication and professional growth (see Figure 3). The data showed that the top short-term goal in 30% of the population involved wanting better communication skills. Health/wellness, organization skills and professional growth were goals that were shared with 20% of the population. Only 10% of the population wanted support in a short-term goal involving personal growth.



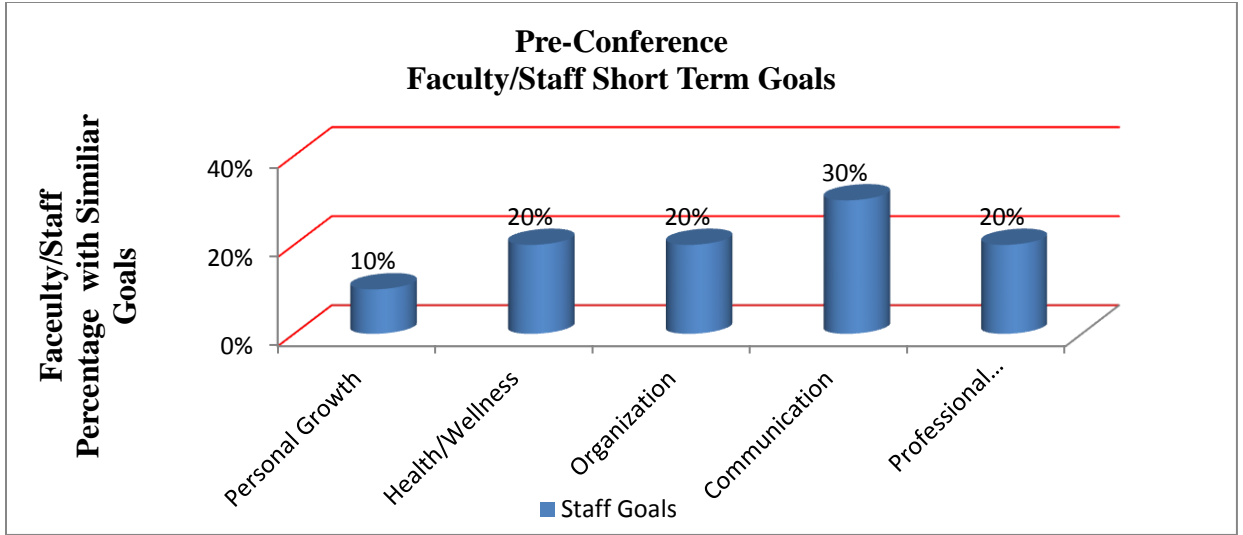


Figure 3. Faculty/Staff member’s short-term goals as discussed in the pre-conference.

Each week the faculty/staff member made an appointment to conference over the status of their short-term goal. At that conference the faculty/staff member submitted a reflection journal filled out prior to their meeting (Appendix C). The reflection journal had the population review their week, documenting difficult situations that took place. The reflection journal asked the faculty/staff member how the situation was handled and if they received needed support. The population appreciated the support and was eager to find solutions to their own problems (see Figure 4).

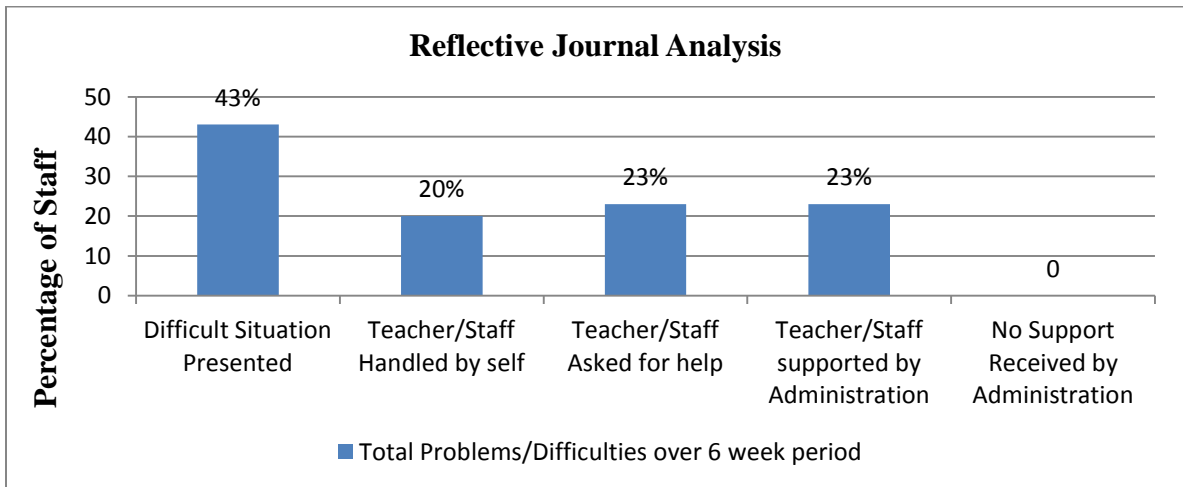
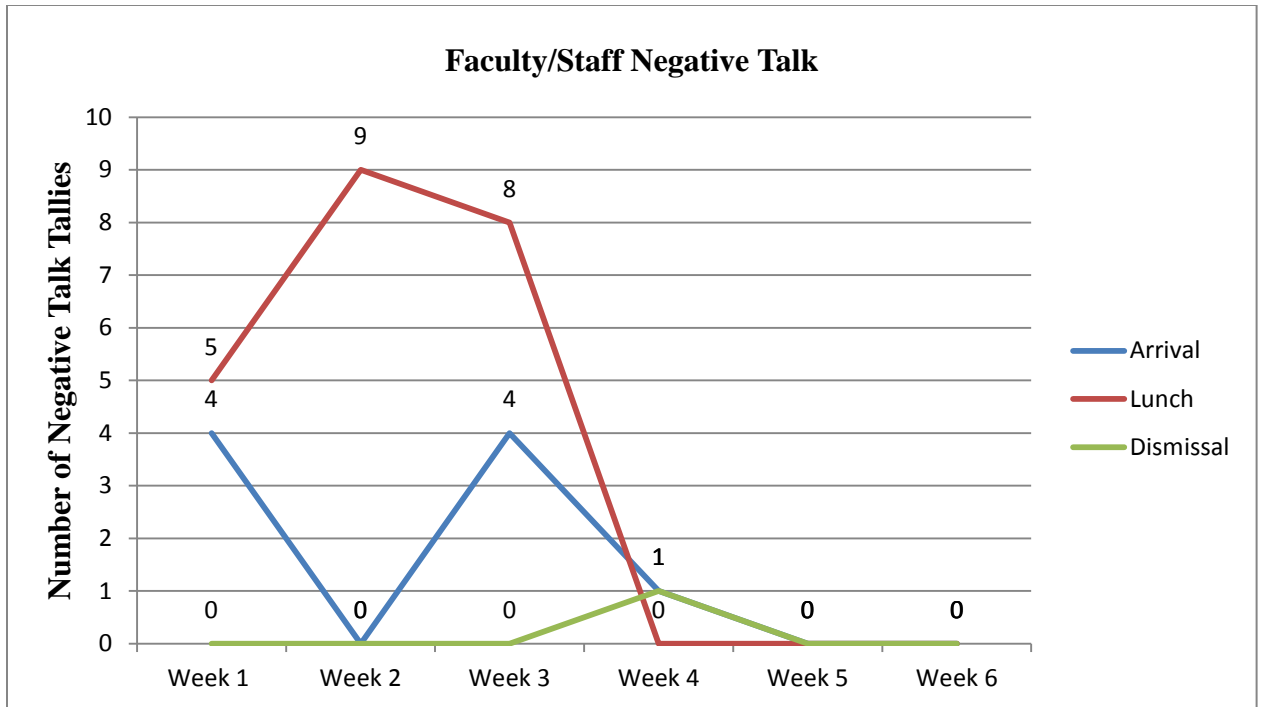


Figure 4. Faculty/Staff Reflective Journal Analysis submitted weekly for six weeks.

The teacher data presented difficult situations over the six week period 43% of the time. The faculty/staff did not report this difficulty to administration and handled it themselves 20% of the time. The population reported the difficulty and asked for support by administration 23% of the time. The faculty/staff reported that they received the support they asked for from administration 23% of the time. Based on the above data, the population did not report lack of support by the administration during this six week period. The teachers presented difficult situations throughout the six week period that were documented and observed. I believe that the teachers were truthful reporting the support by the administration during this period.

Each weekly conference also discussed if my support, using the population's motivational strategies, helped the faculty/staff obtain their short-term goal. The faculty/staff seemed to enjoy our weekly conferences and this process helped them recognize their progress and motivation to reach their goal.

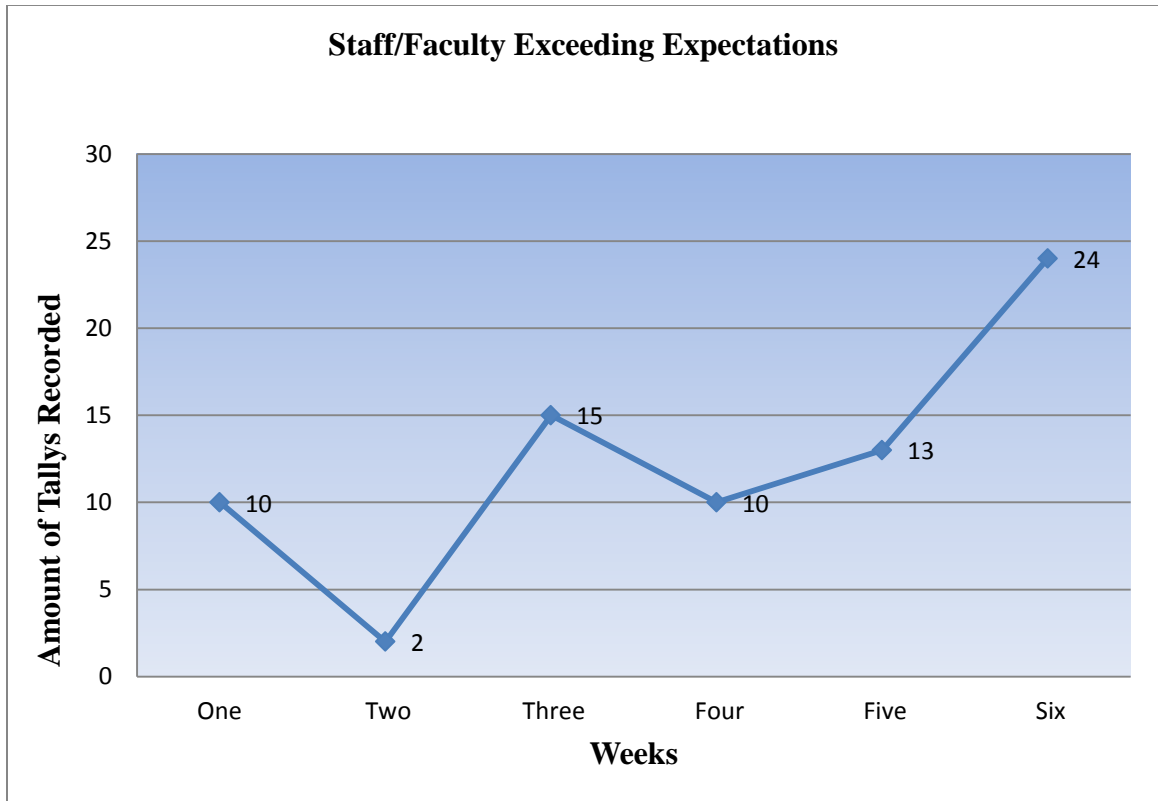
Over the six week period of action research, my assistant administrator tallied negative talk done by the population in the kitchen area during arrival, lunchtime and dismissal. The members of the population who used negative talk were kept anonymous (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* Tally of Faculty/Staff negative talk in the kitchen during arrival, lunchtime and dismissal.

Over the course of six weeks, there were a total of 23 negative talk incidents during lunchtime. The most occurrences happened during week 2 and week 3. During weeks 1 and 3 there were a total of 8 negative talk incidents during arrival. There was limited negative talk during dismissal, with only 1 incident in week 5. The data shows that lunchtime is the most frequent time when the population engages in negative talk. The first three weeks of the action research project were the first weeks of school when children were having separation anxiety, bathroom accidents, and parents were very demanding. As the weeks progressed, the data shows that the negative talk decreased. A possibility exists that the negative talk decreased because the population knew they were being monitored.

In supporting the faculty/staff based on their motivational needs, I collected data to document if the population would be motivated to do more than their daily job requirements in the workplace. Examples would include: cleaning the kitchen, bringing in snacks, taking out the garbage, picking up mail, helping other teachers, etc. Tallies were kept daily and recorded weekly to see the results (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Staff/Faculty who exceeded work expectations over a six week period.

The data shows that the population exceeded job expectations over the six week period. Week 2 documented the lowest recording. Week 2 was the first full week of school. One of the faculty members was out that week and everyone had to adjust their schedules for lunch and specials. Children were having separation anxiety and several had bathroom accidents. Week 2 was also impacted by these circumstances in Figure 6 with negative talk during lunchtime. As the children normalized and the faculty/staff

settled in, the data regarding the population showed an increase in work expectations by week 6. The final recording of the population exceeding work expectations reached 24 tallies.

The final section of my action research report will include an action plan for the further study of the effects of motivational strategies to increase teachers' commitment and enthusiasm.

### **Action Plan**

My research showed an improvement in employee motivation and enthusiasm in the workplace. The online motivation test showed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational forces are different for each person. Over the six weeks of my action research project, I observed that the faculty and staff at the school I direct have an increase in motivation, commitment, and enthusiasm in the workplace. The faculty and staff showed positive behavior and adequate to exceptional job performance. There were no offering of incentives during the six weeks of the action research project. My research shows why it is important for an administrator to understand what motivates each employee. These motivators are essential tools that are crucial to an administrator if they want their employees satisfied and enthusiastic in the workplace. During my action research project, each faculty and staff member set up a short term goal that I supported using their individual motivators. These short term goals were measured, and I monitored their progress. Each faculty and staff member who participated in the action research project met their short-term goal by the end of the six-week action research project. In the past six weeks, negative talk has decreased, and participation and positive energy in the workplace have increased.

Based on the results of my action research project, I will be implementing new procedures for all employees in the workplace. Every new employee will take an online motivational quiz as part of their hiring requirements. At the beginning of each school year, I will set up a conference with each faculty and staff member to set up a short term goal. After meeting each goal, a new one will be set up, and the process will continue until the end of the school year. I will meet with each staff member once a week, throughout the school year, to go over their goal and support them using their individual motivators. At our meeting, we will discuss any situations that worked well or didn't work for them that week. We will discuss how I will support them.

I believe this motivational strategy is important to promote maximum job performance and stimulate positive behavior and enthusiasm in the workplace. A short weekly meeting with each faculty and staff member created a positive connection that has grown into a very positive school environment. Meeting for only 10-15 minutes per week has given the faculty and staff member a personal touch that is hard to obtain when meeting with an entire group. At our last meeting for the action research project, I asked each faculty and staff member to let me know if they wanted to continue the weekly meetings with me. I told them it was completely optional, and I would only schedule them if they felt it was helpful. All participants in the six-week action research project responded that they wanted to continue to meet weekly.

I believe that happy teachers lead to happy students and parents. I will be interested to see retention rates at the end of this school year compared to last year. To date, parents have been very happy and positive. For the remainder of the school year, I would like to see the faculty and staff utilizing the paid time off incentives we offer

attending conferences and visiting other schools. I have received several observation form requests to date, but I will not be able to analyze this data since it will be ongoing until the end of May.

I am curious to see if the motivational data obtained through my action research project results continue throughout the remainder of the school year. There are several factors that are important to consider. Firstly, having begun my action research project at the beginning of a new school year, I have concerns that the timing affected my data. Before my six-week action research project began, training was provided to the staff. We covered the topics of “Authentic Montessori” and “Preparation of the Teacher” at length. We discussed the importance of commitment and communication in the workplace. Secondly, a possibility exists that the decrease in the negative talk in the kitchen was affected by the faculty and staff aware of the monitoring. Perhaps for many it was a habit or an area to vent with no ill meaning behind it. Lastly, I question the possibility that the staff wanted to be in my good graces so therefore told me that I supported them during our meetings.

If I planned this action research project again, I would begin my project at the beginning of January. January through March are months that show a decline of commitment and enthusiasm in the workplace. Negative talk has also been very apparent during these months. These difficult months for the faculty and staff are some of the most important months for the school. Student contracts are due back in the spring, and admission tours are full. I believe it is important to keep the faculty and staff members enthusiastic and motivated during this time, as they are extremely visible to parents or

visitors considering our school for their child. I would be interested in comparing the data I received from this action research project with the data collected midyear.

The research has shown that motivational forces are different for each person. It is important for an employee to be enthusiastic and satisfied in the workplace. I believe it is the role of an administrator to find out what motivates each employee. I feel it is extremely important for administrators to use these motivators while managing each employee and when setting up individual goals. I believe this strategy will promote maximum job performance and stimulate positive behavior and enthusiasm in the workplace.



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Appendix A  
Self Motivation Quiz

Please visit: <http://richardstep.com/self-motivation-quiz-test/>

**Appendix B  
Action Research Project  
Teacher Pre-Conference Sheet**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Discuss short term goals for the next six weeks.**

**Discuss top three motivators from test and how to incorporate them to help staff member reach their goals.**

**Make an appointment to meet once a week.**

**Appendix C  
Reflective Journal**

**Teacher Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please explain an incident or occurrence that has been difficult to handle in any area of the school community.**

**Have you tried to handle this on your own?**

**Have you asked for assistance by another staff member or administration?**

**If yes, did you feel supported? Please explain.**

**If no, please explain why you didn't ask for assistance.**

**What is the most positive experience you have had this week? Please explain.**

**After reflecting on this past week, what is something that you would like to improve or be supported on?**

**Appendix D  
Action Research Project  
Teacher Conference Sheet**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Discuss short term goals that were made at the pre-conference and follow up on their progress.**

**Discuss with teacher/staff member how my support helped them. If they didn't feel supported this week, have them communicate what they needed this week to have been better supported.**

**Make an appointment to meet next week.**

**Appendix E**  
**Action Research Project**  
**Tally Sheets**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Arrival**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Arrival**

**Lunchtime**

**Lunchtime**

**Dismissal**

**Dismissal**



