

# WE MAINTAIN OUR MACHINES BETTER THAN WE MAINTAIN OUR PEOPLE

By Paul Herr

According to Gallup, only 29% of employees in the U.S. care about their work. If this were a college exam, 29% would equate to an “F.” I can therefore state with some confidence that modern “best practices” earn failing grades in “Employee Motivation 101.”

Let’s compare how companies treat their manufacturing equipment to how they treat their employees—their human capital. The difference is enlightening.

Imagine that we are standing in a factory manager’s office. Now let’s ask the manager a basic question, “Is your machinery operating at its rated capacity or is it malfunctioning?” The manager would calmly turn to his computer, pull up a few graphs, and answer confidently, “Everything is functioning according to specifications.”

*“The sad fact is, we treat our manufacturing equipment far better than we treat our employees”*

Now let’s ask the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a service business the same question, “How is your human-capital functioning?” The startled COO would answer, “Huh?” According to Gallup, the financial fallout from this oversight is measured in legions of disengaged employees and in trillions of dollars of lost productivity.

The factory manager has an advantage over the COO. Skilled technicians are assigned to monitor and maintain the plant’s machinery. The machines themselves are outfitted with sensors that track key operating parameters. These parameters are plotted second-by-second on control charts to monitor whether the machinery is operating as expected. Whenever these parameters drift outside of their normal ranges, the machines are stopped, and preventative maintenance is performed. The factory manager, in other words, has far more diagnostic information than the COO.

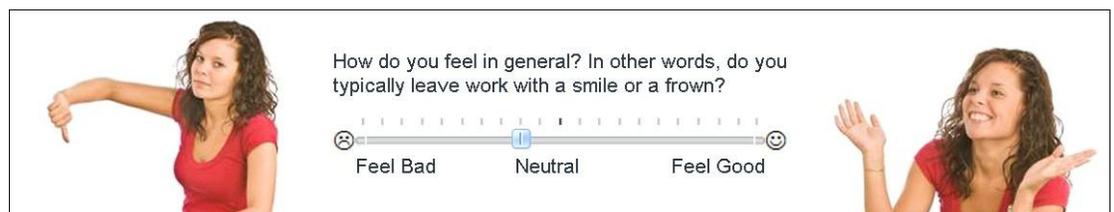
Let’s dig a little deeper into this disparity between the way our manufacturing equipment is treated and the way our employees are treated, because it leads to a startling conclusion—modern corporations don’t understand human nature, don’t understand the motivational engine that drives high

performance, fail to monitor the motivational engine, and fail to perform preventative-maintenance to keep employees operating at their best.

## WHAT'S THE HORSEPOWER OF YOUR ENGINE?

Human beings, just like factory machines, are equipped with sensors that measure our state-of-repair. The output signals from these sensors are motivating feelings of pleasure and pain. When we feel good, we are operating at our rated capacity, and when we feel bad, we are malfunctioning. I developed a simple survey to capture these pleasurable and painful feelings and summarize them as motivational horsepower. I recommend that companies measure their motivational horsepower monthly and plot the results on a control chart to determine whether their employees are functioning optimally or malfunctioning.

If the motivational horsepower is positive, it means that employees experience intrinsic pleasure in their work that is equivalent to a monetary bonus that enhances motivation and productivity. If the horsepower is negative, employees find it painful coming to work, which is equivalent to a reduction in their monetary pay. I propose that motivational horsepower is the single most important parameter a company can measure, yet nobody does so. If companies can get their horsepower to go up, I argue, then every other desirable operational, financial and HR metric should go up with it. The logic behind this bold statement is simple: rewarding feelings drive behavior and behavior determines organizational success. It all boils down to how rewarded people feel in their work.



*Screen Shot of Final Question of The Horsepower Survey™*

At this point our hypothetical COO might protest, “I’m not as clueless as you suggest. I measure the horsepower of my motivational engine with a yearly employee-engagement survey.” To this I would respond, “Measuring motivation annually just doesn’t cut it. If your engine is malfunctioning, do you really want to wait a year to find out? Measuring motivation annually is like measuring cash-flow annually. It is downright un-businesslike.”

To be honest, we shouldn't be too critical of our COO. Motivation is a murky and complex subject. Even the scientific community had a muddled understanding of the motivational engine until recently. The bottom line however is clear—if you want to improve productivity and reduce costs, you need to tap into human nature's pleasure-fueled engine.

I've been studying the motivational engine for 30 years. I know what it looks like and how companies can tap into it. I've also developed a motivation-management tool called The Horsepower System™ that diagnoses the motivational engine and provides leadership tips to get the score to go up. This software is being distributed worldwide in English, Spanish and Japanese.

### About the Author

You can learn more about Paul Herr and his book, *Primal Management: Unraveling the Secrets of Human Nature to Drive High Performance*, by visiting [www.primalmanagement.com](http://www.primalmanagement.com).

If you'd like to test-drive Herr's motivation-management tool, The Horsepower System™, enter the following URL into your browser and enter "guest" for the username and password.

<http://horsepowermetric.com/demo.php>

If you'd like more information about this tool, give Paul a call at 608-833-9446.