



When is the Last Time You Hugged Your Transformer?

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Change does not come easily. Some scholars are even convinced that change is difficult and that people naturally resist it. If a single change effort already bares the etiquette 'challenge', imagine the difficulty of a transformation. Not the kind of transformation that someday is proclaimed finalized. No, not that, but the state of mind accepting a relentless, never-ending change. Working in constant ambiguity and a bit of tolerated chaos. No day the same. What is effective, efficient and affordable today, must be changed to stay effective, efficient and affordable tomorrow. And improve it again the day after. That kind of transformation, pur sang.

For that kind of continuous change, you need people who introduce big and small changes. People who introduce new approaches, who are champions of change. But also people who mature and nurture those ideas and turn them into reality. People who channel the energy; and people who dare to stand up and constructively question everything or everyone. But, how to motivate them?

Let's talk about incentives!

The first thing that comes to mind is: money. Pay those who go in the right direction, supposing you know which one that is, a more. Sounds simple, but unless, you really talk about big incentives for clear cut goals, it doesn't provide that much of a motivational impulse. Although most HR-departments consider this key, I distrust the power of money as a motivational tool. The American psychologist Herzberg, though his method may not be error free, considered one's salary as a 'Hygiene factor' because it does not give positive satisfaction or lead to higher motivation, though dissatisfaction results from its absence. So money will not do the trick. I agree. When was the last time you jumped up of joy after receiving a raise? Hard to recall? Not surprised. How long did your happiness last? Certainly not months! Maybe days, but more like hours. Right?

But even if money was the motivator (in capital letters) nec plus ultra, it would be a no-go in our headquarter. I cannot imagine nations giving lots of money to SACT to motivate his

workforce. If money does not work, what then? Stay with me, and try not to remember that the title of this article gives away the solution.

As military, not unlike scouts, we love showing our accomplishments through colour codes. It even sounds nice when we wear them in full: ribbon and medal. The cling-clang noise signals someone special, because decorated, is walking. In a multinational environment where the visible code of ranks are not obvious to all (and certainly not to newcomers), the complexity of those chest colours is used as an indicator of seniority, hence importance. If, according to Napoleon Bonaparte, a soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon, why not introducing a NATO medal for transformation? In a military headquarter, and I'm quite sure our civilian colleagues would also appreciate it, this should create a great effect.

Of course, I make the assumption that the number of medals would not be limited. Why? Well, what is the use of giving a medal to one, when there are ten who deserve it? Why giving one when there are no good candidates, just because a year passed by? Everyone who deserves one, must get one. At, or at least very close to, the moment he/she deserves it.

That is where our medal system fails us. We find it so important that we sacrifice speed for being right. Once we give someone a medal, we cannot take it back. We do not like 'sorry, you did not deserve this medal' ceremonies. So, we take our time, and a lot of paperwork, to investigate before getting a new one out of his box. Or, we keep the rules very easy, like so many days in the area of operation, to prevent mistakes. With the pace and complexity of transformation, 'a public thank you for what you did 6 months ago' completely misses the intended effect. We love our medals, but for fuelling transformation, they just won't do the job.

What's left? Giving more responsibility or autonomy? That would be the answer when asked to an expert on organisational motivation. Although I 'm convinced this could have a positive effect, this means that our organisation must be (re)designed to grant that kind of change. No use in giving someone more autonomy, when the hierarchical organisation suffocates all initiative. It is like promising an ice cream to a kid standing before a waffle kiosk. But the more fundamental question is: should we all, as experienced commanders of possible devastating military capabilities, not already have that kind of entrusted flexibility? Why motivating people with something that should already be a given?

While thinking on how to realign the organisation, how do we keep motivation high? Real transformers do not depend on external motivation do push things forward. It is their

inner believe that thrives them. But because not everybody has that internal drive, we have to find something. That something is free, but not easy. It comes in the form of a simple appreciation, recognition.

Imagine yourself sitting in your cubicle staring at the defilé of e-mails on your computer screen. Suddenly, you feel the presence of someone standing next to you. You turn around and there stands our COS. Your mind sparks off neutrons in search of a raison why the general is standing there. What did you do wrong? 'Thank you for your excellent point paper'. He shakes your hand and off he goes.

For sure, the next thing you do is nothing. Simply too stunned to fully appreciate what just happened. Maybe a cup of coffee will do the job of reviving you. Your colleagues ask what that just was, and you have to tell the brief instant of surprise again and again.

Reinforcing it every time you do so. And reinforcing good things is important on both the emotional, and the neuro-biological level. Guess how long this effect will last (think about the raise)? Hours, days, months? This also works with hard core transformers, because they are humans too. Every time you write a point paper, you will strive to do it even better. And maybe, the next time someone does a great job for you, you will thank him or her. Increasing the effect of this brief, free gesture.

Although free and simple, saying an honest thank-you is not easy. We do it very rarely (and some of us do not even know have to receive one). You really have to mean it and go to the person. And you have to vary the way you do it (a little note, a pad on the back, a coffee ...). It is maybe a bridge too far to suggest, as done in the title of this article, to give a hug. Although, the highest decorations in the French armed forces are accompanied by a hug, the so-called 'accolade'. Strange when you see it for the first time, but very powerful. As the YouTube clip demonstrates, you really feel appreciated when somebody hugs you (<http://youtu.be/pdxo1mZeY68>).

So, when is the last time you hugged your transformer?