

Motivating a Team

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

As a PM, your job isn't to psych people up every morning. It's to remove blockers, give people ownership, and make sure their work actually feels like it matters. Get that right, and motivation tends to take care of itself. Here are some practical ways to motivate without authority.

1

Give them Ownership

Include the team members actually doing the work in client meetings, not just you as the go-between. Let them speak to their own expertise, act as the consultant they are, and push back respectfully when needed. It builds their credibility with the client and gives them real stake in the outcome.

2

Ask before you Tell

"What do you think is the best approach here?" builds buy-in.

3

Recognise The Effort, not just the Outcome

Call out good work when it happens, not just at the end of a project. Specific recognition ("the way you handled that client escalation was excellent") lands harder than generic praise.

4

Remove Blockers

Nothing kills motivation like sitting stuck waiting on someone else.

5

Give them Room to Grow

Let them try something outside their usual role, lead a small piece of work, or pick up a new skill. People stay motivated when they can see a path forward, not just a repeat of last sprint.

6

Check in as a Person

Ask directly, and separately from the work talk. "How are you finding things at the moment?". Notice patterns too, not just what someone says.

What Motivates People at Work?

Research consistently points to three core drivers:

Autonomy: People want to feel trusted to do their work. Micromanagement is demotivating even when it comes from a well-meaning place.

Mastery: People want to feel like they are getting better at something that matters. Giving someone a stretch challenge or acknowledging their expertise is more motivating than a thank-you email.

Purpose: People want to understand why their work matters. Connecting the task to the outcome, the client, or the bigger picture makes a difference.

When Someone Is Not Engaged

Before assuming someone is difficult or checked out, check these:

- Do they understand what is expected of them and why it matters?
- Do they have what they need to do the work?
- Is something outside the project affecting them that you are not aware of?

A quiet check-in is almost always more effective. Ask first. Escalate only when you have genuinely tried.