Tester Motivation – Top Ten Tips

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These tips on tester motivation were derived from an extensive survey of over 600 testers carried out over a two year period. Two white papers describing two different aspects of the survey are listed in the references at the end.

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."   - Kenneth Blanchard

1. Feedback & Appreciation

Testers respond well to being given positive feedback and told they are appreciated – they also say they find *lack* of feedback to be their second highest demotivator. Given the relatively low cost of satisfying this need and thus enhancing motivation it should be on every manager's 'To Do' list. It appears, however, that currently only the more senior (and presumably better trained) managers are good at setting their staff measurable goals and then successfully providing regular and positive feedback based on these goals.

"The best use of money as a motivator is to pay people enough to take the issue of money off the table."   – Daniel Pink

2. Money

A number of studies have shown that for professionals working in jobs like IT using money as a motivator is at best useless and at worst counterproductive. One reason being that recipients of bonuses compare the amount of their bonus to the extra they feel they contributed – and generally decide that they got a bad deal. Only 7% of the testers feel getting more money is motivating and 'too little money' was tenth in the list of demotivating factors, so apparently not a major issue.

"Variety's the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavor."   - William Cowper

3. Multiple Projects

The opportunity to work on a variety of projects is a strong motivator for most testers. If projects are of short duration, then satisfying this requirement should be easy, and care should be taken to not leave testers on maintenance of the same system for too long. Nearly half of test analysts report that that they are demotivated by being asked to perform repetitive tasks; presumably this should be taken as an indication that test automation should be considered.

*"The key to life is accepting challenges. Once someone stops doing this, he's dead."
- Bette Davis*

4. Challenges

Being challenged by their work and working in new areas was the highest single motivating factor chosen by 17% of the testers. Their job challenging and stretching them was also measured to be one of the top four correlations with motivation - this increased with tester seniority. We all like to be challenged but testers in more junior roles appear to have less opportunity in this area.

"You manage things; you lead people."   - Rear Admiral Grace Hopper

5. Management

Poor management was considered to be the top demotivator by the testers (20% of them chose it); whereas just 5% believed that good management was worth listing as a motivator. Lack of experience does not appear to be a factor in this result as a large proportion of managers have over 10 years' experience. It appears, again, that lack of skills (and presumably training) is the reason.

"Let them eat cake."   - Marie Antoinette

6. Pizza & Beer

Out of 950 responses on what motivated them, not one tester suggested beer and pizza. In fact, just one tester mentioned food and drink as a potential motivator – and that one asked for cake.

"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team." - Phil Jackson

7. Work Environment

Although not being one of those factors considered by traditional motivation theories, the work environment scored highest of all individual factors when correlated against testers' motivation. Choosing who to work with also scored consistently highly as a motivating factor across all tester roles. Getting on well with trusted colleagues is obviously extremely important and highlights the need for test managers to foster good team morale.

Anyone who has lost track of time when using a computer knows the propensity to dream, the urge to make dreams come true and the tendency to miss lunch."   - Tim Berners-Lee

8. In the Flow

Getting 'into the flow' and becoming so engaged in their work that they forget the time is one of the top motivators for testers. This can be an almost cost-free motivator as it takes no financial outlay to achieve this. Simple good management and the insight to provide a working environment where testers can work undisturbed for reasonable amounts of time (without being constantly interrupted by email and instant messaging) can achieve this.

"Any fool can write code that a computer can understand. Good programmers write code that humans can understand."   - Martin Fowler

9. Developers

An unexpected result was that a number of testers explicitly stated that they find developers to be demotivating. They also cited some other project-related reasons such as changes to schedules, getting the blame for defects, and the project ignoring previously-agreed exit criteria as also being demotivating. In a nice symmetry, it appears as if the developers find testers to be demotivating. Rather than being motivated by their work impacting the project and their colleagues (as would be expected by the theories – and as the testers were) they were noticeably demotivated by this. It could be that the main impact the developers have on testers is when testers find defects in the code – and so the subsequent interaction would be unlikely to motivate the developers.

"Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else."   - Margaret Mead

10. Smarter Motivation

An expected result, but one that *should* have a big effect on those trying to motivate testers, is that testers performing different roles are driven by different motivators. Thus, there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' solution that applies to the testing industry as a whole - some of the factors that strongly motivate testers in one role, demotivate testers in another role. Therefore we need to take a 'smart' approach to tester motivation that is based on evidence (see references below) rather than using old and generic theories.

References

[1]   Reid, Stuart, *Motivating Testers – What's in a role?,* February 2014.

[2]   Reid, Stuart, *Motivated or Motivating? What sort of tester are you?,* EuroSTAR 2013, November 2013.