

MOTIVATION OF A FORESTRY WORKER

R.H. Kimpton,
Forest Manager,
Alex Harvey Industries

"A man's interest in the world is only the
overflow of his interest in himself"

George Bernard Shaw.

INTRODUCTION

A key factor in any forestry venture is labour.

New Zealand has over one million hectares of exotic forest and by the year 2000 there is a predicted three-fold increase in wood production. Despite the importance of the people necessary to physically establish, silviculturally tend and eventually harvest this resource they are with few exceptions¹ the most neglected in terms of research into what motivates them. Managements appreciation of motivation is also very suspect and in many situations non-existent.

MOTIVATION

A motivator is what induces an individual to perform. A motivator reflects the individuals wants, needs, desires, fears, etc. A common list of such motivators will usually feature :

- higher pay
- security
- status
- promotion
- love
- hate.

A supervisor has to create and maintain an environment in which his subordinates work as a team to achieve a common goal or target. A supervisor cannot do this without knowing what motivates the individuals that make up this work group.

It is necessary for the supervisor to identify his subordinates needs and on doing this the supervisor should be able to find a motivator.

1 M.R. Fielder, N.Z.F.S. Kaikohe. Published N.Z. Journal of Forestry Vol.28 No.1.

"An example the writer experienced was; Two gangs scrubcutting (on wages). The supervisors only input to each gang was to advise them that the other gang was cutting more than them. Off the job both gangs were totally intergrated and the best of friends. On the job each gang was striving to be the best.

The motivator was status: Being a member of the best gang.

In identifying the needs of his subordinates the supervisor will depend on how well his assumptions coincide with reality.

In 1982 Mark Fielder conducted a motivational study of silvicultural workers at Aupouri Forest, Northland. In his study he found money to be the prime motivator for silvicultural workers. In a section of the industry renowned for its low wage levels and generally poor acceptance of incentive schemes this would appear to be an anachronism.

Questions which are sure to be asked are: Why, if money is such a prime motivator are incentive schemes and contract opportunities not more widely sought? Why is absenteeism still a problem? Managements failure in many situations has been to look upon money incentives as the only motivator and to disregard the "needs" of the workers.

Whilst it is true to say little has been done in the emotional study of forestry workers, much has been done in studying workers generally. This work by such eminent Behavioral Scientists as Frederick W. Taylor, often referred to as the Father of Scientific Management, who introduced Time and Motion (now work study) to the work place, Elton Mayo Human Relations and Social Factors associated with the work place, Abraham Marlow Hierachy of Needs Theory, Frederick Herzberg Motivational Factors Theory has a relevance to the forestry worker.

There have been and are still many Behavioural Scientists looking at aspects of motivation in the work place. To adapt these to the forestry worker does not seem too difficult. Despite this there appears to be little effort to include any of this work in the training programs for the Certificate of Forestry or the Bachelor of Forestry Science courses. Most forestry supervisors learn the aspects of motivation more by accident or trial and error during their careers than by any formal instruction.

FORESTRY WORKERS

New Zealand, historically, has been unfortunately blessed with periods of economic hardship. During these troughs in the economy unemployment tends to rise and forestry is given a boost. Our earliest forests were established as much as an employment opportunity as for their future resource potential.

How often do we hear Kaingaroa - thank God for the 30's depression!

It has been expedient for the government of the day to create the employment schemes by whatever name (and there have been many) they may be termed, to absorb a growing unemployed resource. Forestry as a labour intensive occupation requiring little capital outlay initially was a means of providing immediate effect in

the governments drive to keep unemployment down. This social requirement presumes that people want to work in forestry. In this respect the motivation factor becomes important. Is it fear of being unemployed - the social stigma - is it desire for money - is it social status? The motivational force will be different for each person.

Although forestry is physically demanding and therefore more appropriate for young fit people, a check on any forestry gang bus will show that a broad cross section of age groups is represented. Given this 15-65 year age span of workers and the increasing numbers of females within this previously exclusively male domain, why do they seek active employment in forestry? During the writer's almost two decades of involvement with a wide variety of employees engaged in forestry operations, one thing is certain - no one motivator fits all forestry workers.

Some of the reasons given for seeking employment were :

- I need a job or I will be sent to goal.
- My wife has said don't come home unless you get a job.
- I don't want to be on the dole.
- Mum says I can't stay at home without a job.
- I can't leave school until I have a job.
- I would like to make forestry a career.
- All my mates work in forestry.
- I want a job cutting trees down.
- I need the money.
- There's no other jobs going so I guess this will do.

The above list of reasons for seeking employment will get a person to come to work and hold him there - but what will make them put in extra effort so that jobs are finished on time? What makes them work well?

Recollection of a discussion held between the writer and Ian Bennett (N.Z. Workers Union) on such a topic included :

- do something worthwhile - a goal
"My work is interesting and varied, I know why I am doing it and the standards set are reasonable, I'm part of a team."
- doing my share - participation
"Others in the gang depend on me. My ideas are listened to by the supervisor. The boss discusses things with us and his door is always open."
- counting for something - recognition
"They recognise me as a person and for what I can do. I get credit for good work, and help if in trouble, I feel part of a group."
- knowing what's going on - communication
"The supervisor tells me how I'm going, where I fit, what's going on in the other areas and why. We are given an opportunity to discuss any changes and asked for our opinion."

- getting a decent living - fair wage
"We are offered help to improve our skills and so earn more money for increased effort. We are involved in improving our own work environment."

(My apologies to Ian Bennett for those items I have left out.)
The above constitute a series of motivational factors that have been tried and proved.

SUMMARY

With the increase in planted area resulting in expanded silvicultural programs on all forests and therefore increased labour requirements, it is important to consider the motivation of this manpower resource. More emphasis is necessary on the part supervisors play in motivating forestry workers. These supervisors require training in motivational factors.

As the over one million hectares of exotic forest progressively come on stream for logging an increasing number of the present forestry workers will want to move into logging.

Why will they want to move?

What will keep them in the industry?

There are still many unanswered questions and these need to be seriously looked at.

At all costs we should avoid the following illustration of motivation within our industry.

A Conservator of Forests driving down the road noticed a particularly enthusiastic labourer pruning trees on the roadside. He stopped to observe the youth. "I say there," he called, "You're doing a very good job there. How do you like the work?"

"Its okay I guess chief," replied the labourer.

"What sort of reward do you expect for your hard work?" asked the learned gentleman.

"Well chief, if I do a bloody good job and get finished in time I get sweet stuff all. If I don't finish on time or do a poor job the boss will kick my arse down the road."

Such is motivation!!