

People Do Things for Their Reasons, Not Yours

But now I said to them, "You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!"

Nehemiah 2:17

Gordon Bethune took over Continental Airlines as CEO when it was in a free fall in 1994. The airline had one of the worst on-time records in the business. Customer service almost didn't exist. Planes were dirty. Workers lost luggage.

The first problem Bethune tackled was the on-time record. He pledged non-manager workers \$65 bonuses every month the airline's on-time rate put it in the top five nationwide. Baggage handlers, gate and reservation clerks, flight attendants, and secretaries were all part of the pool.

He arrived at the \$65 by determining what it cost the company each month to run flights late. At \$5 million per month, Bethune was willing to give half of that back to the employees (\$65 times 40,000 employees) if they turned their on-time record around. He announced the program in January 1995. In February of 1999, 80% of Continental's flights landed on time.

By providing a financial windfall to the employees, all of a sudden, planes were clean. Motivation was up. So were profits. People were doing things for their reasons.

During Nehemiah's time, the city walls encircling Jerusalem, God's holy city, lay in ruins. It was a disgrace. A city's walls were for protection. Without the stone barricade and nothing to stop their enemies, the inhabitants were defenseless and vulnerable to attack.

People are experts in cost-benefit analysis. Everybody asks, "What's in it for me?" Constructed walls around Jerusalem would benefit the residents of the city. Nehemiah knew this and acted on it. He led the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, not for his sake (he lived a thousand miles away) but for their sake. And, it wasn't an extra \$65 a month in their paycheck; it was for the protection of their very lives and their families.

One can poke, prod, and push people, and they don't move. But give them a good reason—one of their reasons—a way in which they will benefit, and they will follow where you lead.

People do things for *their* reasons, not *your* reasons. *Their* reasons.