

The Five Languages of Motivation

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Dr. Gary Chapman wrote *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* in 1992. His premise from many years in private practice counseling couples was that people have specific ways they express love and gratitude and more so, they want to receive love and gratitude in similar ways to how they express it.

Dr. Chapman's book has been in the *New York Times* bestseller's list since 2009 and he has written several other books in his Love Language series, including how love languages can be applied to the workplace.

Love Languages, at their core, are about feeling valued and making others feel valued. Feeling valued and appreciated is critical to any relationship, both personal and professional.

Often as managers we struggle with meaningfully recognizing our team members. Many times, we try larger systems of recognition, a one size fits all approach for the whole team. Employment lawyers have often drilled into us that consistency is the best way not to get sued, so it stands to reason that this is what we would try. These systems inevitably are met with mixed reviews as the recognition speaks to some and falls short for others.

This is the difficulty with expressing value for the team. Value, at its core, is individualistic. Additionally, being fulfilled at work is more than just feeling valued by your colleagues and manager.

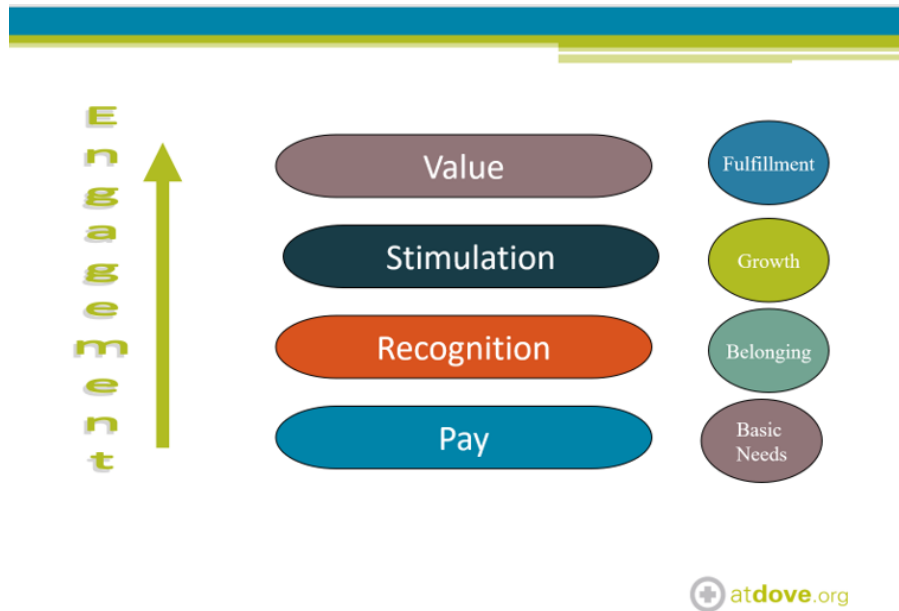
According to a blog by Benjamin Todd of 80,000 Hours, fulfilling work has the following components:

- Engaging work
- Work that helps others
- Work that you are good at
- Good relationships with boss/coworkers
- Basic needs met (pay, safety, etc.)
- Fits into your personal life (schedule, commute, etc.)

The good news in veterinary medicine is that many of these components are built in, such as engaging and helpful work. Finding work we are good at usually comes naturally to us. While it is good to have stretch positions and projects we do tend to gravitate towards work where we feel successful.

Veterinary medicine does have some areas where this list may fall short over the lifespan of one's career. While our work is engaging and helps others, caregivers often are in a position to get compassion fatigue and burnout. Veterinary medicine is also not known for work-life balanced schedules. While this is something the industry seems to be trying to achieve, the schedule demands of your clinic may be difficult for your staff doctors to maintain if you are unwilling to approach the schedule with some flexibility.

When we look at the Employee Hierarchy of needs, “basic needs” is the first component to engagement, feeling recognized, and feeling valued.



If you think about this, it makes sense. Even if all other things are equal, if we, as humans, have unstable housing, food, safety, we can never feel secure enough to begin to feel recognized, valued, or even fully engaged in the performance of our work. With the state of student debt in the veterinary field and the rising cost of living for the west and east coasts, meeting basic needs is a real concern for both our support staff and our DVMs.

Many of the downsides of veterinary medicine are things we, as managers, can certainly influence, but the only one we can truly control is our ability to communicate meaningfully.

Humans experience the world and the people around them uniquely as their past experiences often color their world in both positive and negative ways. This is why wider employee recognition initiatives often fail, we are trying to make individuals feel valued (which will therefore motivate them) by applying a singular, proletariat system.

Love Languages, in their purest form, are how we say “I appreciate you” in a meaningful way to our colleagues and team members. This thoughtful communication makes people feel more valued, which leads to a more motivated team as they are getting positive and meaningful recognition for their work.

Quality Time

Dr. Chapman states that everyone has a primary love language and a secondary love language. According to Heidi Pride, who conducted a survey on love languages and different Myers Briggs personality types (<https://thoughtcatalog.com/heidi-priebe/2015/10/each-myers-briggs-personality-types-preferred-love-language/7/>), quality time is the most common love language spoken (of the 16 MBTI types, all but three report quality time as their primary language). We have used this survey with our own staff at DoveLewis and find that the results are fairly accurate.

Quality time is primarily defined by Dr. Chapman as undivided attention, it is not merely being in someone’s presence, but focusing your attention on them. Many managers make the mistake of multitasking on the floor while checking in with their staff members. While it is okay to do that sometimes, people will hear from you that they are valued by more deliberate actions. Specifically:

- Prioritizing 1x1 check-ins.

- Rearranging your schedule to talk to someone who has requested some time with you
- Actively listening while they talk, giving them your undivided attention (eye contact, not multitasking while talking).

Acts of Service

Acts of service is fairly self-explanatory; it is doing small tasks for someone else to show your appreciation and let them know you find them valuable. Often these are small tasks that help someone's day run more smoothly (i.e., helping set up for a procedure, cleaning, prepping slides, running SNAP tests, etc.). You can often tell if people speak this language if you notice them doing this for you or others they appreciate.

Dr. Chapman reports that sometimes people speak the language of "acts of service," but the tasks they are helping out with are not necessarily what the other person would call helpful. In work, this is easily solved by asking one another about priorities so you can show your appreciation by helping with the right tasks.

Words of Affirmation

Words of affirmation is defined as the desire to hear positive words of reinforcement. I find that this one tends to be difficult for veterinary medicine managers who are often action oriented, hands-on problem solvers. Words of affirmation go far beyond a "good job" every few hours. To truly be meaningful the words:

- Should be sincere words of appreciation
- Should be encouraging, kind, and come from a place of humbleness
- Should come in different forms (i.e., cards, emails, verbal praise).

People who speak words of affirmation will be caught going out of their way to make sure people are hearing these words from them. They may ask to start a kudos board for the staff or will ensure they thank people at the end of the day for their work throughout the day. Sometimes people who speak words of affirmation get embarrassed by public recognition, so it is always good both to watch how people deliver affirmations and ask how they want to receive praise from you.

Receiving Gifts

People who speak the language of receiving gifts enjoy receiving their affirmations through tangible items. The assumption upon hearing someone likes to receive gifts as praise is that they are materialistic or want expensive items. Dr. Chapman would say that it is not about the gift itself, it is the act of giving the gift.

In a work situation, receiving gifts can and should lean on the side of thoughtful vs expensive. Small items like a stethoscope charm or a button that says "dental queen" are small and easy items to show appreciation, as is a favorite coffee. Gift giving can be seen by other team members as a tangible result of favoritism, so it is important to have conversations with your staff about "motivation languages" not just to ensure you are speaking their language but also to help them understand why you might only be getting a few coffee from time to time.

Physical Touch

Physical touch can be seen as the toughest language to "speak" in the workplace. This language should be approached with caution as there is a fine line here that should not be crossed. People who communicate appreciation via physical touch are quick with people they value to give hugs, lock arms, or give a touch on the shoulder. In the workplace they can be communicated with appropriately by:

- Leaning in when talking to them with open body language
- Putting your hand on the table to symbolize closeness when talking
- Quick touches on the arm or shoulder during appropriate conversations (i.e., comfort, stress).

When expressing that you appreciate someone or find them valuable, doing so meaningfully can be a game changer in terms of motivating your staff. Be flexible to what people need, pay attention to how they speak, and always lead with empathy. These are the best ways to make communicating with motivation languages successful.