

Incentivizing Productivity vs Creativity

Looking for a way to increase productivity for your team? Then consider using rewards and incentives... but only if it's the *right* type of productivity you are looking to encourage.

Confused? Read on and let's look in a bit more detail at which types of rewards work best in which types of situation.

Why Incentives and Creativity Don't Mix

When it comes to boosting productivity in terms of 'pure' work, using incentives can work very well. In other words, if you want someone to more efficiently print flyers, perform data entry or sweep the rooms, using incentives works very well and this has been verified by studies. For manual labor and anything else that lacks a truly creative element, you want to encourage people by offering them rewards for putting in time, effort and energy.

When it comes to creative tasks though, you need to be smarter with your incentives. This is because studies have shown us that a sense of urgency actually *blunts* out-the-box thinking. This was demonstrated by challenging participants to complete something known as the 'candle box test'. In the candle box test, the challenge is to attach a candle to a wall using only a box of tacks. Most people try to attach the candle to the wall directly by tacking it there, not realizing that they can actually use the box that the tacks came in as a shelf. Their creativity is limited by something known as 'functional fixedness' and when there is a reward offered for getting the task right, it takes longer for people to find the correct answer. That's because they become more focused and more single minded – even more stressed – and this removes their ability to think creatively.

How to Incentivize Creative Tasks

So how *do* you increase productivity on a creative task?

One method is to give those involved more personal stake. In other words, if you put their name on the project or if you let them present it to your superiors, then they will be more likely to think creatively about it.

At the same time, it's important to give employees autonomy to work the way they want and to put them on tasks that they enjoy as much as possible.

All these things will help to make creative tasks more rewarding *in themselves* which is far better for increasing productivity. And remember this yourself when you're trying to finish typing out that novel at home – if you're too strict with yourself then your book will suffer!