

Recommendations for Laboratory Tops Incorporated (fictional company)
Prepared by: Moira Hanna, Clemson University

Organization Background

Laboratory Tops Incorporated is a small manufacturing organization that has grown from 15 to 170 workers since its conception. The organization specializes in the production of epoxy resin laboratory desk tops and has only one direct competitor.

The management of Laboratory Tops has approached MH Consulting with several concerns that they believe to be motivational issues and we agree. They have requested that we develop several motivational programs to address these concerns. Therefore, this report will contain the following elements:

- 1) An overview of the motivational concerns presented to MH Consulting
- 2) An explanation of the theory used to develop the programs
- 3) 3 motivation programs designed specifically for Laboratory Tops Incorporated

This document serves as a proposal to Laboratory Tops Incorporated, providing suggestions for improving the motivation of their employees in conjunction with our rationale behind these suggestions.

Overview of Motivational Concerns

MH Consulting was presented with 4 concerns that have been expressed by the company president. (1) The first concern surrounds the improper disposal of hazardous chemicals by the 2nd shift workers. This particular problem can lead to EPA and OSHA violations if it is not remedied. (2) The second concern expressed is the high rate of absenteeism and low rate of productivity for the Casting department day shift employees. Laboratory Tops has indicated that they believe this to be due in major part to friction between the employees and the Senior Casting Operator. (3) The finishing department also has a much lower individual productivity than in the past, in part due to more streamlined production techniques. (4) Finally, the Maintenance department has also been the source of complaints. The department, according to the VP of Production, is not completing repairs quickly enough and often the wrong repairs are made.

These four concerns deal primarily with productivity/absenteeism, inadequate leadership, and safety issues. Each of these issues will be addressed by the motivation programs presented in this proposal. First, however, it is necessary to understand exactly what motivation is and the theory behind the proposed interventions.

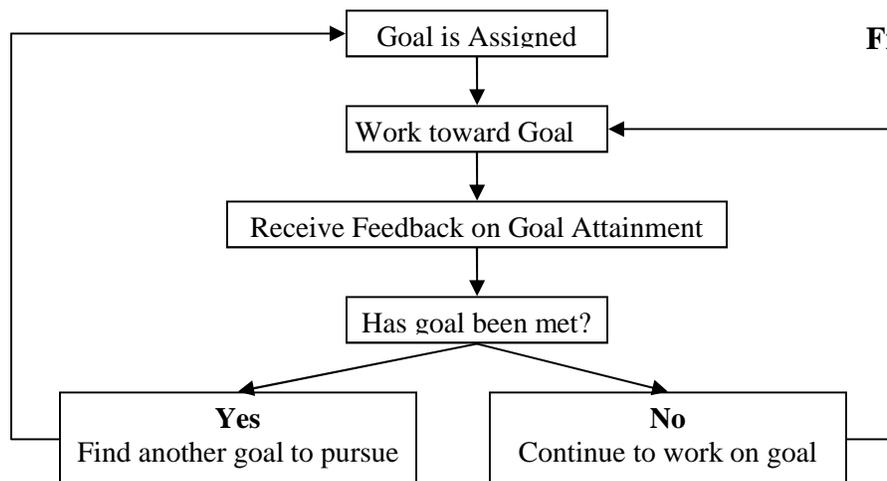
In the following section, therefore, a general overview of the theory behind the proposed motivation programs will be briefly discussed.

Section 1: Motivation Overview and Theoretical Background

Motivation is a concept that has enjoyed many different definitions over the years, ranging from simple to complex. The definition that will be used for the purpose of this proposal is quite simple: *motivation is the allocation of time and effort*. Therefore, when we talk about a “motivation program” we are discussing a program that encourages employees to focus their time and effort on specific activities such as coming to work, being productive, and working to become a more communicative leader.

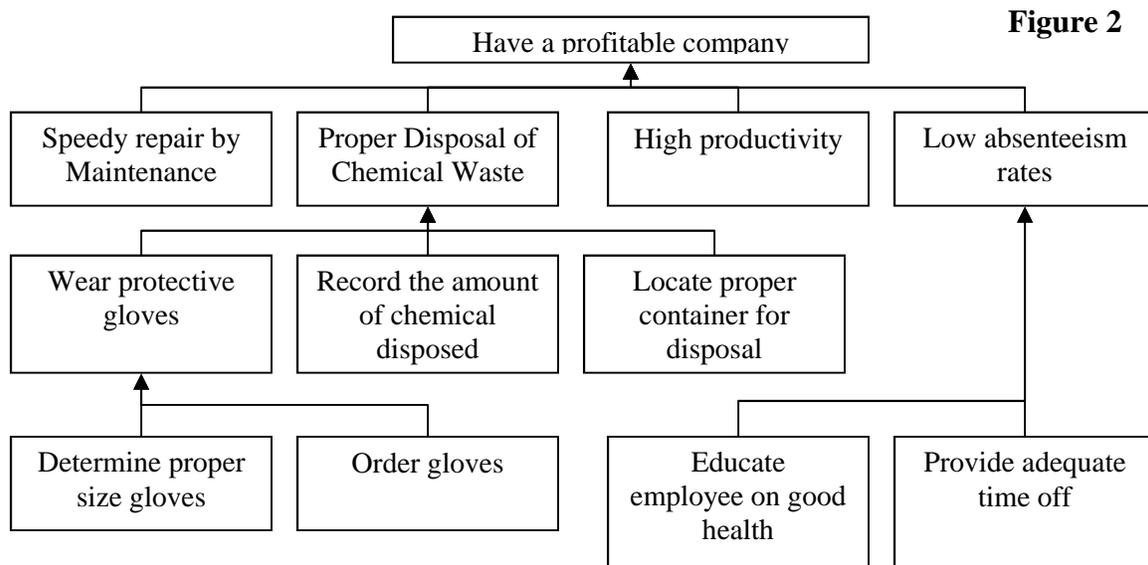
There are many different theories of motivation available for use in work motivation programs; however, they are not all created equal. Nearly all motivation theories have some kernel of truth, but some theories are not practical to implement, too complicated to be completely tested or based on outdated information. The theory of self-regulation, however, is a relatively new theory with many attributes, making it an ideal choice for use in developing the proposed motivational interventions for Laboratory Tops.

Self-regulation refers most simply to a feedback loop process and is used hand-in-hand with the goal-setting theory. First a goal is assigned that is both difficult and specific. After the goal is assigned it is important to receive feedback on how well you are progressing toward the goal. Because receiving and providing feedback can be difficult and uncomfortable, feedback should be offered in as impersonal a manner as possible, focusing on facts. This feedback process is the heart of self-regulation. Much like a thermostat, you must first evaluate where you are in relation to achieving the goal. If you have met the goal, a new goal is assigned and the process begins again. If you have not met the goal, you must keep working toward that goal. Progress toward the goal is re-evaluated periodically until the goal has been achieved. When progress is being made quickly, the employee is likely to feel better (positive affect) than when progress is moving slowly or has stopped. Figure 1 (shown below) illustrates this feedback process.



Rarely is it the case however, that a person will be assigned just one goal, or a goal that does not have sub-components. Therefore, self-regulation theory in combination with goal theory has a goal hierarchy piece. For any given task (e.g., disposing of waste properly) there are many subtasks (e.g., wear protective gloves when handling chemicals, record the amount of chemical disposed, locate proper container for disposal, and put chemical in the proper container) that must be completed in order for the overall goal to be met. For each of these

subordinate, or sub-goals, there is a feedback process as discussed above and shown in Figure 1. Please refer to Figure 2, below, for a sample goal hierarchy for Laboratory Tops (Note: this is not a complete goal hierarchy, merely a portion of a potential hierarchy).



Finally, there is one last major point to consider within the self-regulation/goal theories. How do you get your employees to accept these goals if they are assigned? The feedback process works well, but if your employees don't accept the goal, they will not allocate their time and effort to meet the goal. This is where goal theory is important. There are two main ways to increase employee acceptance of assigned goals. First, make sure employees believe they can meet the goal by giving them the resources and knowledge needed to be successful. Second, make sure the employees value the outcome of meeting the goal (e.g., pay increase, lunch on the company, certificate of achievement). Although the best way to increase goal acceptance and motivation is to meet with each employee in a 1-on-1 situation and ask them what outcomes they would personally value, this is often not practical. Therefore, the outcomes of goal attainment must be broad enough to motivate a wide variety of employees.

Despite the strength of this theory, it does have 2 notable weaknesses. It is important to note, however, that each weakness can be neutralized with minimal effort. First, there is not a mechanism within this theory to dictate how often feedback should be sought out/provided. Therefore, when implementing a self-regulation program, it may be necessary to adjust the amount of time between feedback sessions until the best interval is found. The second weakness is that there is no rule on how many times a goal should be attempted (and failed) before moving on to a different goal. Therefore, it will be important for management to watch such factors as whether or not ultimate goal attainment is worth the continued cost of goal failure and if there is a person better suited to attempting the goal.

In summary, self-regulation theory in combination with goal theory proposes a strong mechanism for attaining corporate goals. There are 9 important components inherent within these theories, each of which has been discussed in this section. They are summarized below for your convenience.

- 1) Goals should be assigned.
- 2) Goal acceptance must be attained and can be heightened by understanding what is important to your employees and providing them with the tools necessary to complete the task.
- 3) Feedback is essential to the self-regulation process and goal attainment.
- 4) Each goal has sub-goals that form a goal hierarchy.
- 5) Each goal in the hierarchy, regardless of where it falls in the hierarchy, has a feedback loop.
- 6) Feedback should be impersonal.
- 7) Intervals between feedback sessions should be monitored and adjusted as necessary.
- 8) Cost and importance of goal attainment should be monitored closely in the face of repeated failure to reach a goal.
- 9) The faster the progress toward the goal, the better we feel (positive affect).

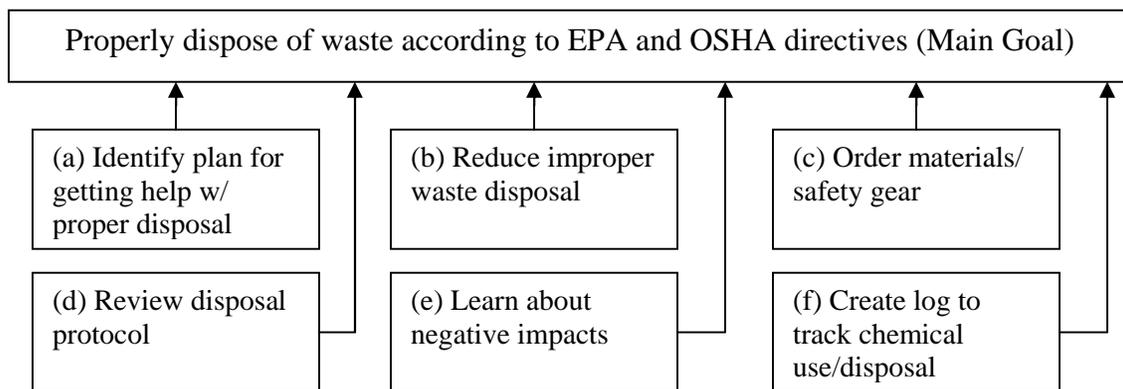
In the following section 3 motivation programs/interventions will be proposed. These programs are based on the tenets of self-regulation and goal theory. Each program will include the following components:

- 1) Brief overview of the program (what concern will be addressed)
- 2) Rationale behind the program (why it was chosen)
- 3) Program outline
- 4) Resources needed for implementation (time and cost)
- 5) Potential limitations
- 6) Potential benefits
- 7) Chart illustrating the how the program maps onto self-regulation theory

Section 2: Motivation programs

Motivation Program 1: Fortune Cookie Anyone?

1) *Program Overview*: This program aims to increase proper waste disposal through the use of assigned team-level monthly sub-goals.



2) *Rationale*: This program was chosen because properly disposing of chemical waste requires both time and effort on the part of the employee. Given that the definition of motivation is the “allocation of time and effort”, this particular problem is the perfect target for a motivational intervention. It is likely much easier to throw away the chemicals than to properly document their disposal and take all of the proper EPA and OSHA-related

precautions. This program, through the use of difficult and specific sub-goals, will help the employees to learn why they should spend the extra time and effort to dispose of the chemicals as well as develop a protocol for disposal that is understood by all. Finally, this program was chosen because it takes something that is mundane and makes it interesting by introducing the use of fortune cookies.

3) *Program Outline*

1. Fortune cookies will be filled with assigned sub-goals on proper waste disposal for chemicals. These goals include (also shown above):
 - a. Each week post a list of 5 ways improper waste disposal can have a negative impact (e.g., on the environment, on health, on the community) (each team member should contribute to this list).
 - b. Reduce improper waste disposal in your team by 50%, if you already dispose of waste properly 100% of the time, develop a plan outlining how your team will continue to do so.
 - c. Identify and order any necessary materials and safety gear for disposing of the chemicals (e.g., gloves, trash containers, "Hazardous" labels)
 - d. At the weekly staff meeting, review the proper protocol for disposing of waste.
 - e. Develop a protocol for enlisting help in disposing of waste if your team is not able to do so properly.
 - f. Create a log detailing how much of each chemical is used and how it was disposed of.
2. At the beginning of the program, each team will receive a basket with 6 fortune cookies; each cookie has a different "fortune" or goal. The team will then pick a fortune cookie (each shift gets to pick a cookie) and read their goal. This goal will then be posted in a location central to all team members (e.g., bulletin board, lunch area). The first goal for each team will be (a) "...list 5 ways improper waste disposal can have a negative impact..." in order to increase goal acceptance. After this 1st goal has been met, all other cookies will be chosen at random.
3. The team will work toward the assigned goal. At the end of one month the team will be required to report to their Senior Operator on their progress toward the goal.
4. If the goal:
 - a. Has been met, the team will pick a new fortune cookie with a goal for the next month and steps 2-4 will be repeated.
 - b. Has not been met as determined by the team's Senior Operator, the team will continue working toward the goal for another month. In order to ensure that progress is made during this next month, the team will create a plan for successfully meeting the goal. At the end of the 2nd month progress will again be assessed.
 - i. If the goal has been met, a new fortune cookie goal will be chosen and steps 2-4 will be repeated with the new goal.
 - ii. If the goal has not been met, a meeting will be held with the Senior Operator to determine what is inhibiting the team from achieving the goal. The necessary changes will be made and progress will be checked every 2 weeks until the goal has been met. Once the goal has been met a new fortune cookie goal will be chosen and steps 2-4 will be repeated with the new goal.

This process of goal assignment, working toward goal, and feedback will continue until all fortune cookie goals have been met by the team. When the team has completed all goals, they will receive a complimentary lunch (or other meal during their shift) to celebrate the successful completion of the program.

4) *Timeline and Cost Analysis*

1. Timeline: This intervention is scheduled to last a minimum of **6 months**, but may last longer depending on how long it takes for each group to meet the goals.
 - a. Pick cookie and work toward goal: 1 month
 - b. Feedback: at end of 1 month
 - c. A and B repeated for each of the remaining 5 goals: 5 months
 - d. If goal is not met, reevaluation takes place at 2 week intervals
2. Cost
 - a. Fortune cookies w/basket: \$100
 - b. Complimentary meal: \$10-15 /person * 170 employees=\$1700-\$2550
 - c. Time away from work: negligible
 - d. **Total Cost = \$1800-\$2650**

5) *Potential Limitations:*

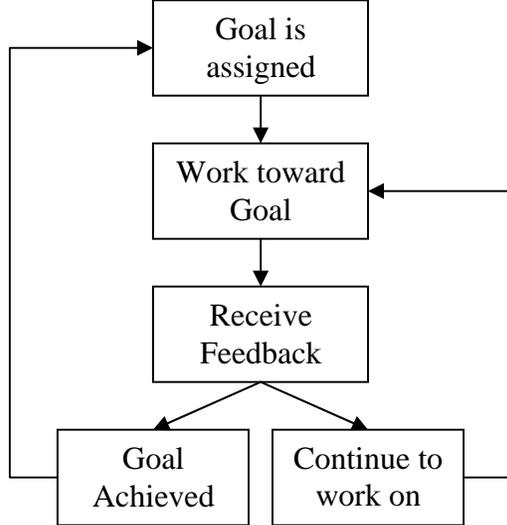
- Improper waste disposal may go back to previous levels after the end of the program.
- This program lasts a minimum of 6 months and employees may lose interest in the process. If this begins to happen, the length between feedback sessions can be shortened. However, the length is also a potential benefit as discussed above.
- There is no mechanism in place for teams that fail to meet their goals within a timely fashion. Therefore, the program may not be taken as seriously because there are no job-related outcomes (positive or negative). Laboratory Tops may implement outcomes if they choose to do so.
- The main goal may not be seen as important despite sub-goal a. (negative effects on environment) and managerial endorsement.

6) *Potential Benefits:*

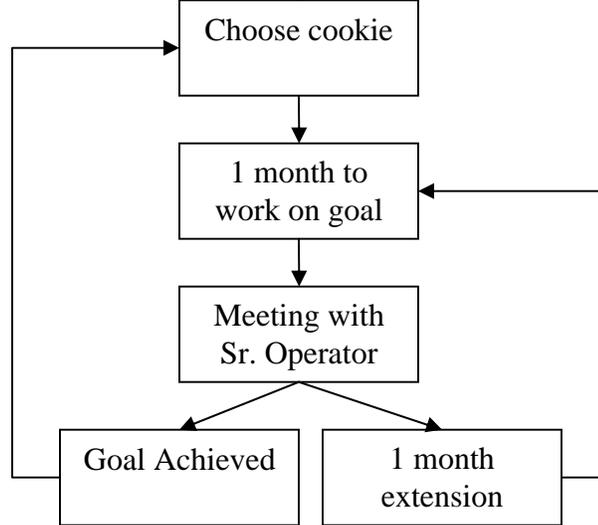
- Goal acceptance should be high because the 1st cookie that focuses on understanding how improper disposal can affect your life. This heightened goal acceptance should encourage teams to work diligently toward meeting the remaining sub-goals.
- Proper waste disposal may increase, thus lessening the threat of EPA and/or OSHA violations and repercussions, ultimately saving the company money.
- The program is at a minimum 6 months in length. Because this is a substantial amount of time, by the end of the program it is more likely that employees will have formed the habit of properly disposing of waste.
- Employees may gain a better understanding of how to properly do their job and why the EPA and OSHA standards are important to follow.
- The program has a low cost in comparison to potentially high litigation costs and fines in the event of documented EPA and OSHA violations.
- This program can be used independently of the other 2 proposed interventions.

7) Relation to Self-regulation

Self-regulation Model



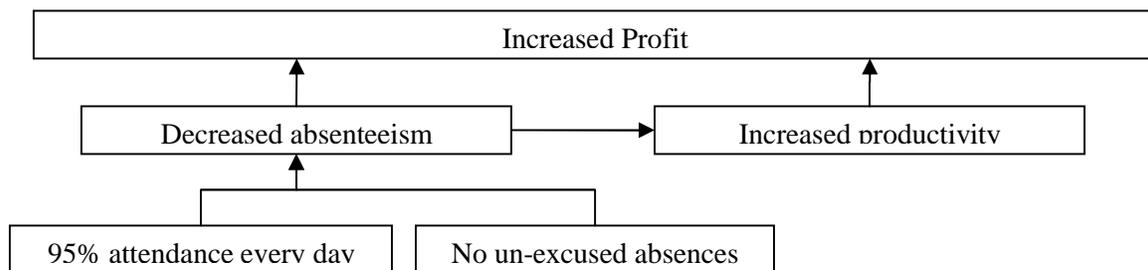
Fortune Cookie Anyone?



As shown in the diagram, this motivational program follows the prescription set forth by the self-regulation theory of motivation. Not shown in this picture are the precautions taken to ensure progress toward meeting the goals. More specifically, at each feedback session (if the goal has not been met) the team, with the help of the Senior Operator, is responsible for coming up with a plan of action for the next segment of time. Additionally, goal acceptance has been worked into the first sub-goal of the program by having employees discuss how their improper waste disposal practices can affect their family, community, and environment.

Motivation Program 2: Who will be the next Iron Chef?

1) *Program Overview:* This program aims to increase company profit by decreasing employee absenteeism and increasing employee productivity for the Casting day shift specifically, but all departments will participate in the program. (This program can be used in conjunction with program 3, or by itself.)



2) *Rationale:* This program was chosen because the Laboratory Tops indicated that absenteeism was high and productivity was low. This may be due in part to the friction felt between the manager and his/her team, however, it may also be due in part to a lack of motivation to come to work. Again, this indicates a failure to allocate one's time and effort to coming to work rather than staying at home. This program will utilize difficult and specific goals as well as a unique outcome (participation in an Iron Chef-type competition).

3) *Program Outline*

1. Each team will be informed that a new program is being implemented and any team that satisfactorily meets the goals assigned will be eligible to participate in an Iron Chef inspired competition.
2. Each team will be informed of the sub-goals they must meet in order to participate in the company-wide Iron Chef competition. These goals include (also shown above):
 - a. 95% team attendance or higher every day for 3 weeks. Team members on extended medical leave, who are hospitalized, are on vacation, etc. are not to be included in this calculation.
 - b. All absences must be excused. Any team member who does not either report to work or have a valid excuse (e.g., illness, vacation day, etc) will be counted as absent and this will lower the attendance rate for the team.
3. At the end of the 3rd week all teams will meet with their manager for feedback on whether or not they met their goal. If the goals:
 - a. Have been met, the team will be deemed eligible to participate in the Iron Chef competition and the goal has been completed. At this time, the Senior Operator may choose to assign a new goal to the team regarding attendance standards.
 - b. Have not been met, as determined by the team's Senior Operator, the team will be given another 3 weeks to meet the attendance goals. The Senior Operator and team members will discuss potential reasons why they failed to meet the goals in the 1st 3 weeks and set up a plan to help them achieve the goals in the 2nd 3 weeks. At the end of the second time period, the team will again meet with the Senior Operator to assess their status. If the goals:
 - i. Have been met, the team is eligible to participate in the Iron Chef competition alongside the teams who met the goal during the 1st 3 weeks of the program.
 - ii. Have not been met, the team will be excluded from submitting a dish to be judged in the competition. The Senior Operator may, at this time, assign new attendance goals to the team or another team goal may be pursued.

Two weeks after the final feedback session (either at 3 or 6 weeks) an Iron Chef inspired competition will be held. Each team competing will make a dish using the ingredient cinnamon (or other designated ingredient). On the day of the competition, at 3:45-4:15pm (shift change) all teams will bring their dish to be judged anonymously. The judging panel will consist of Division Supervisors, VPs, and the CEO. The winning team will be named the "Iron Chefs of Laboratory Tops Incorporated" and will be presented with a plaque to hang in their department with their department name and the year.

4) *Timeline and Cost Analysis*

1. **Timeline:** This intervention is scheduled to last **5 to 8 weeks**. If all teams meet the goals in the first 3 weeks, the program will last 5 weeks. If any team fails to meet the goals and must continue on to the 2nd 3-week time period, the program will last 8 weeks. Two timelines are provided, one for each instance (5 or 8 weeks).
 - a. Weeks 1-3 *or* 1-6: Teams will work toward the attendance goals
 - b. Week 3 *or* 3 and 6: Meet with Senior Operator
 - c. Weeks 3-5 *or* 6-8: Team plans for Iron Chef competition
 - d. Week 5 *or* 8: Iron Chef competition takes place

2. Cost

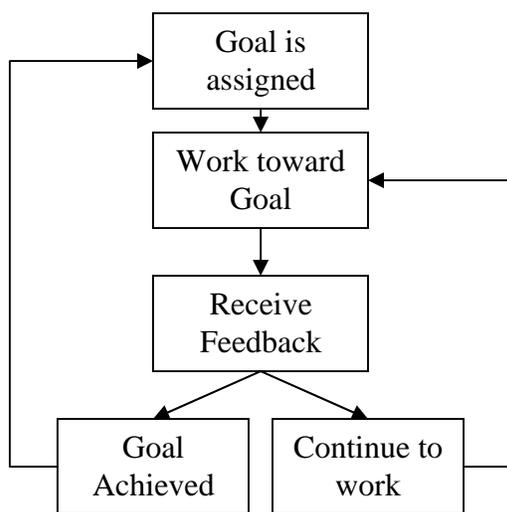
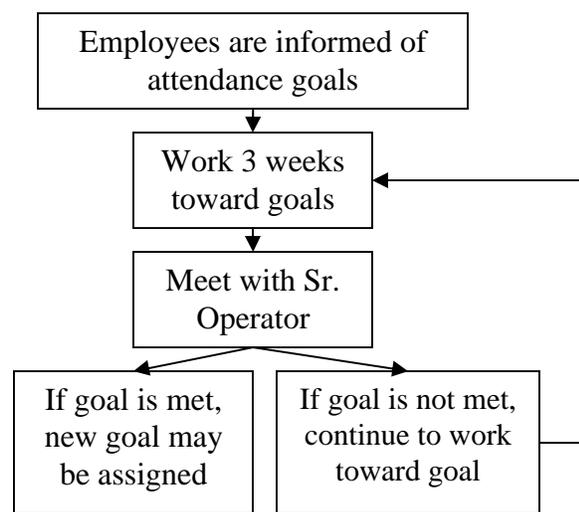
- a. Plaque with engraving: \$100
- b. Time away from work: negligible
- c. **Total Cost: \$100**

5) *Potential Limitations:*

- This program may produce short-lived results. After the competition, absenteeism may return to its previous levels. However, if this program is used in conjunction with Program 3, this problem may be alleviated.
- If teams do not meet the attendance goals, there is no penalty mechanism in place other than the team may not participate in the Iron Chef competition.
- This program will work best if implemented in conjunction with Program 3.

6) *Potential Benefits:*

- Reducing absenteeism will help to increase productivity and ultimately increase company profit.
- Goal acceptance should be high because only departments who meet the assigned goals are eligible to participate in the Iron Chef competition.
- The program is short and inexpensive to implement.
- The program is short and, therefore, should hold the interest of the employees.
- The program can be used numerous times, and may even be instituted as an annual company event. If the program is used on an annual basis, the ingredient should be changed by management and the plaque may be passed to the current Iron Chef team with their department and year engraved.

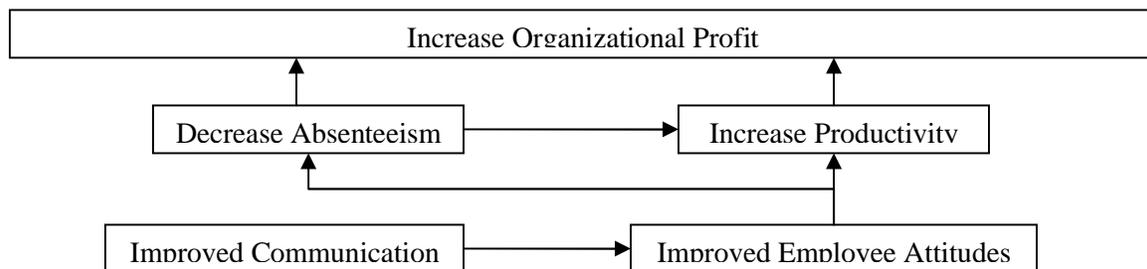
7) *Relation to Self-regulation*Self-regulation ModelWho will be the next Iron Chef?

As shown in the diagram, this motivational program follows the prescription set forth by the self-regulation theory of motivation. Not shown in this picture are the precautions taken to ensure progress toward meeting the goals in the 2nd 3 week time period. More specifically, at the initial feedback session the team, with the help of the Senior Operator, will develop a plan

for meeting the attendance goals in the second segment of time. Additionally, goal acceptance has been worked into this program via a company-wide announcement of the Iron Chef competition prior to the assignment of the attendance goals.

Motivation Program 3: Employee Relations: Does the company good

1) *Program Overview*: This program, like Program 2, aims to decrease absenteeism and increase productivity. However, this program will combat the problem from a different angle by focusing on the improvement of employee attitudes toward leadership. More specifically, focusing on the actions of the Senior Operators and how they relate to and communicate with their team members.



2) *Rationale*: This program was chosen because management believes, as does MH Consulting, that part of the absenteeism and productivity problems stem from friction between management at the Senior Operator level and subordinates. Often leaders are faced with time-consuming paperwork, meetings, and other responsibilities that pull them away from the actual job of leading. This program is calling for the Senior Operators to allocate their time and effort toward communicating more effectively with their employees. Therefore, as part of this motivation program Senior Operators will set time aside, that they would not ordinarily have, to learn about what their employees need from them. By communicating more effectively with the employees, employee attitudes about management should improve and it is likely that absenteeism will decrease and productivity will go up because employees will no longer be avoiding work as a means of avoiding the friction present. Finally, this program was chosen because it offers a way for employees to take an active role in letting their leaders know what they need, which can lead to heightened respect and acceptance of the Senior Operators.

3) *Program Outline*

1. All employees will be informed that the company will be focusing on improving communication between the leaders (Senior Operators) and their subordinates for the next 3 to 5 months. The goal for this program is:
 - More positive employee attitudes toward Senior Operators as measured by an employee attitude survey.
2. First, team members will complete an employee attitude survey in relation to their Senior Operator to serve as a baseline measure of attitudes.
3. After these baseline measures are complete, the team members will receive a comment box in which they can submit suggestions for ways the Senior Operators could improve their management of the team. Employees will also be asked for ways that the Senior Operators could communicate more effectively and respectfully with the employees. Additionally, team members will be asked to provide feedback about any concerns they have about the Senior Operator's method of management.

4. Senior Operators will then meet, as a group, to discuss the comments and develop an action plan for dealing with the concerns as they apply to their direct areas (e.g., casting, fabrication, finishing, and maintenance). At this point, the Senior Operators will be given 3 months to go back to their departments and work on implementing these action plans.
5. At the end of the 3 months, the team members will again complete an attitude survey. These results will be compared to the baseline measure taken at the beginning of the program. The President will meet with each Senior Operator to discuss any changes that have or have not occurred. If the goal of more positive employee attitudes:
 - a. Has been met, the President and Senior Operator will discuss ways to keep up this positive trend and the program will be complete. A new goal may be assigned by the President at this point based on the company's needs.
 - b. Has not been met, the President and Senior Operator will discuss methods for improving the employee's attitudes. Additionally, feedback will be gathered in the form of the comment box from the team members once again. Based on the initial feedback session between the President and Senior Operator as well as the new comments, an action plan will be developed for use in the following 3 months. At the end of the 3 months, the employee attitude survey will again be administered. If improvement:
 - i. Has been made, the President and Senior Operator will discuss ways to keep up this positive trend and the program will be complete. A new goal may be assigned by the President at this point based on the company's needs.
 - ii. Has not been made, the President and Senior Operator will again discuss a new plan of action according to the process outlined in 5b. This feedback process described in step 5b will be repeated until an improvement has been made.

When the team's attitudes have successfully shifted in a positive direction, the team and their Senior Operator will each be rewarded with \$10 Visa gift cards to be used as they wish.

4) *Timeline and Cost Analysis*

1. Timeline: This intervention is scheduled to last a minimum of **4 months**, but may last longer depending on how long it takes for each team/Senior Operator to meet the goal.
 - a. Take baseline measure of employee attitudes: 1 week
 - b. Obtain comments in the comment box: 1 week
 - c. Senior Operators meet to discuss the comments and develop plans: 1 week
 - d. Work toward goal: 3 months
 - e. Feedback Session: 1 week
 - f. If goal is not met, reevaluation with re-administration of survey takes place at 3 month intervals
2. Cost
 - a. Employee Attitude Survey:
 - \$5/person*170= \$850/administration*2 administrations= \$1700
 - (for Senior Operators who do not meet their goal, each additional administration will cost \$850)

- b. Comment Boxes (1 per department): $\$5 \times 4 = \20
- c. Gift Cards: $\$10/\text{person} \times 170 \text{ employees} = \1700
- d. Time away from work: negligible
- e. **Total Cost = \$3420 (minimum)**

5) *Potential Limitations:*

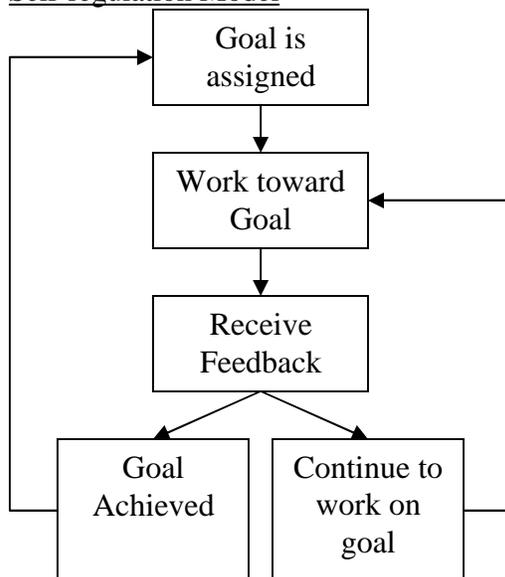
- The program is the most expensive of the proposed interventions, but employee relations may be at the root of many problems being experienced at Laboratory Tops Incorporated including absenteeism and low productivity.
- The program may work best when implemented in conjunction with Program 2.
- Attitude change typically takes at least 3 months; therefore this program is set up to detect the earliest possible change likely as noted in the benefits sections. However, it is also possible for change to take longer than this and therefore the measurement 3 months into the program may not detect a significant change in attitudes. If this is the case, the 2nd measurement time (at 7 months) may be more likely to show changes.

6) *Potential Benefits:*

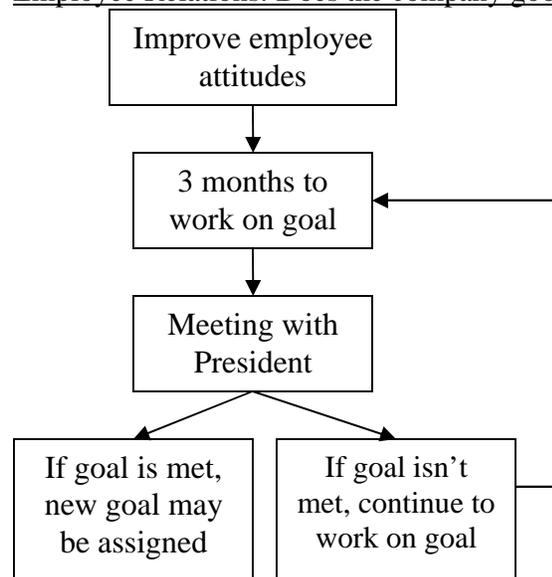
- By asking the team members for their input into the leadership program, they may be more willing to accept changes the Senior Operators make.
- This program can be use independently or in conjunction with Program 2.
- The program may improve several problems that the President has noted; primarily, absenteeism and low productivity.
- Attitude change typically takes at least 3 months; therefore this program is set up to detect the earliest possible change likely.
- By improving the relationship between the Senior Operators and employees, other aspects of the work environment may improve and allow for a more collaborative environment.

7) *Relation to Self-regulation*

Self-regulation Model



Employee Relations: Does the company good.



As shown in the diagram, this motivational program follows the prescription set forth by the self-regulation theory of motivation. Not shown in this picture are the precautions taken to ensure progress toward meeting the goals. More specifically, at each feedback session (if the goal has not been met) the Senior Operator, with the help of the President, is responsible for coming up with a plan of action for the next segment of time.

Section 3: Conclusions

Based on the information provided to MH Consulting by Laboratory Tops Incorporated, three main concerns were identified as potential motivational problems. First, employees have not been disposing of waste according to EPA and OSHA regulations. Second, employees, particularly those in the Casting Division, have been experiencing high absenteeism rates and low productivity. Finally, there appears to be a communication problem between management and employees.

The 3 proposed interventions are designed to address these concerns and have a feedback mechanism built into their design. By providing frequent feedback, employees will be able to maintain their momentum toward goal attainment and feel positive about the time and effort that they are allocating to the programs goals.

By implementing the three proposed interventions, either simultaneously or individually, Laboratory Tops Incorporated may be able to advance in the direction of having a more productive and profitable company.