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AUGUST 24, 2015

WHEN A BADGE IS MORE THAN A BADGE: HOW TO CREATE MOTIVATING WORK EXPERIENCES

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Last week, I received my badge as a new Mars associate. It didn't come with any fanfare or special ceremony, and honestly, the photo isn't my best side (not that I have a best side), but it was an important moment for me. It was a touchpoint as I start my journey as a Mars associate.

Most of all it connects me, and that is motivating. We all want to be part of something and to make a contribution to a broader whole. So how to companies and leaders create the conditions for this kind of motivation for employees? How do employees create connections that matter? Here are some thoughts based on some early experiences here at Mars Drinks:

Connect to the Business. At Mars Drinks, every day at 9am a bell rings in the office and everyone gathers around a giant bulletin board to hear an update from the shift supervisor on quality levels, reliability, and key issues. It's very cool. It grounds us in the business. It focuses us on the products our company produces. Most of all, it reminds us of the value we're providing to the customer. This is a good thing – since we all have a role to play in that value chain – and businesses that connect their associates to the business provide a sense of identity that is motivating. A mentor of mine, Dr. Carl Frost, used to say that people need to know 'what day it is'. By this, he meant they needed to be connected to the business and to its customers in order to do their best work.

Connect the Dots. Of course a key part of feeling part of the value chain is understanding our role in it. Last week, I had the opportunity to work in the factory for a day. I ground coffee beans, tested packets for quality, and packed boxes. (Thank goodness for the professional associates who were by my side every moment to ensure I didn't mess anything up too badly.) It's a standard part of all orientation for new associates. It is priceless time. The 'water-level' view of all that goes on in production provides meaningful insight to the

processes and discipline that ensure quality. It's also a mirror to the commitment of associates. They talk about their jobs, what the company means to them (a lot!), and the standards they follow in order to ensure that the customer gets the very best product possible. In every business there is a 'water-level' view that is important to an understanding of the value we're creating for customers. I once worked with an HR associate at a hospital, and her office wasn't too far from the emergency entrance. She found it important to hear the scream of the ambulances. It was sobering, but it was also motivating for her. It reminded her of how her job mattered to the whole of the organization and the people it was serving. It's important that every associate, regardless of role or level, have a handle on how this water-level understanding of the contribution the company is making.

Celebrate. My timing for joining Mars Drinks has been great (I'm not sure there could have been a bad time). I was just in time to hear the results of the Gallup Great Place to Work survey that the entire company does every year. I learned about the results for a couple different teams, for business units, and for the organization as a whole. The information is shared broadly and it drives open conversation. While the results are impressive and the scores are high, the focus is on good work, follow through, and ways to continually improve. Celebration is also an important part of the equation. There was a cake for each of the production teams. Of course the magic wasn't the cake. It was the motivation that came from feeling appreciated and sharing in the success of a connected team effort toward engagement and excellence.

Connect with Others. Motivation is also about our relationships with other associates. We want to know how we fit. We want to know how our work aligns with others. I've had the opportunity to begin meeting a lot of people in the business – to ask questions and seek advice. There's a sense of pride and welcoming atmosphere. Most of all, it's helping me to see the business from multiple vantage points. This is motivating too. A business that provides plenty of opportunities for associates to connect with each other – both formally and informally – does a service to its people and their level of engagement in contributing to the company.

Give them the Keys. So back to that badge. It's a symbol of belonging. It's a symbol of the high expectations and the contribution that will be required. It's also a symbol of being part of something bigger that matters to our customers and to each other. It's a symbol of connection, and that is motivating indeed.

¹ See Bring Work to Life by Bringing Life to Work: A Guide for Leaders and Organizations for more detail on Dr. Frost and his lessons.

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