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Lighting Corporate Passion:
Everything you need to know about FedEx Day

Rob van Lanen

Introduction

A FedEx Day is a 24-hour event in which employees deliver innovation to the company they work for. It is called FedEx Day, because you have to deliver overnight, like the parcel delivery company. A FedEx Day is a fixed time box in which people are not disturbed for regular work. Within this time box, employees have total autonomy over the project they are enthusiastic about. They decide for themselves what they will be working on, who they are going to work with, and how they are going to do it.

Only one rule applies:

> People who sign up show the results to the company at the end of the FedEx Day.

In short, a FedEx Day is about boosting motivation and creativity overnight by getting out of people's way.

Business Model

The traditional business model regarding motivation is built around external motivators, the carrot-and-stick motivation scheme. For simple, mechanical tasks, punishments prevent bad performance and higher incentives lead to higher performance. However, in more complex work, the majority of tasks in business require conceptual, creative thinking.

The traditional motivation scheme does not apply to these types of tasks. If you promise people higher rewards for better performance, scientific evidence[i] shows that the results are worse. A FedEx Day can result in a boost of motivation and performance of your employees in only 24 hours (12 business hours).

Additionally many employees have great ideas for improving their work and the products of the company. Traditional management often does not provide the autonomy for employees to implement these ideas. Business is often hectic and the pressure on delivery is always there. However, these employees often have the best innovative ideas, since they are the ones closest to the work. Organizing a FedEx Day provides a short time box of high-intensity work in which employees implement their ideas and present them to the company.

In software development, we are witnessing heightened interest in agile implementations. Agility is a mindset to facilitate self-organization. It puts the responsibility of how to do software development in the hands of the people who are doing the work. Management often resists change, even if the status quo does not lead to satisfactory results.

The false security of having an out-of-date plan is often more tangible to management than the introduction of agile. When you encounter resistance, you could suggest organizing a FedEx Day. This is an opportunity to show management that just a few people can deliver innovative, working software in only 24 hours. If they can deliver value in 24 hours, imagine what a whole team using the agile mindset can deliver in a typical Scrum time box of two weeks! This argument proves to be very helpful in a board room pitch for agility.

Background

The topic of intrinsic motivation is described in the book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*[ii] by Daniel Pink. His book about intrinsic motivation is a must-read for all managers. For a short introduction, you can also watch his YouTube movie RSA Animate: Drive.

Daniel elaborates on an updated model for motivation, which contains three elements:

- **Autonomy:** the desire to direct our own lives.
- **Mastery:** the urge to get better and better.
- **Purpose:** the yearning to do what we do in service of something larger than ourselves.

PAT Learning Solutions was inspired by the idea of a FedEx Day through reading about Atlassian in Daniel's book. Atlassian is an Australian software company that regularly organizes FedEx Days. You can find an excellent FAQ on their website. Rumor has it that Google's GMail and Facebook's Like button originated from similar initiatives at those companies.

Experiences

In our first FedEx Day at PAT Learning Solutions in the Netherlands, just the development team (10 people) participated. We facilitated a one-hour demonstration to show the results to the company at the end. The (non-IT) colleagues voted on the projects that had the biggest potential and we awarded small, funny prizes to all participants. In our second FedEx Day, the entire company participated (30 people). In both instances, we started in the middle of the day and worked until the same time the next day, ending with a demo for the entire company.

The benefits to the company fall into two areas:

- **Innovation**
- **Motivation**

Innovation

We delivered four projects on our first FedEx Day. Our product strategy team decided to include two of the projects (including the winning one) in an upcoming release. Moreover, we had one technical project for and by two hardcore developers. Last but not least: we delivered an internal project that was up and running the next day.

The 1st FedEx Day winners at PAT Learning Solutions!

On the second FedEx Day, we delivered ten projects. One project was a migration of our customer calls to a new system, which could not be automated. It is a manual process which was done by 12 people overnight (result: approx. 1700 of 2000 calls migrated to the new system). The winning project was a platform of applications that project, in real time, the locations of our users on Google Maps, on Google Earth and on the smartphone. It shows users' locations when pointing a smartphone camera (using a Layar app for augmented reality) in their direction

Motivation

A lot of employees worked late for their project. Some of them even spent the night at the company in sleeping bags or did not sleep at all. There were no interventions from management: people were given the opportunity to excel without being disturbed. One aspect that is very hard to measure, but of the utmost importance: people get to know each other better in a different context. It proved to be a great team-building exercise and resulted in an improved atmosphere in the workplace.

Organizational Tips

When organizing a FedEx Day, please use the following pointers to maximize the results:

- Reserve a Kick off, a FedEx Day, and a Demo. This should be done months in advance, to make sure schedules are free. In this way, the undisturbed time frame is preserved.
- Organize a 1-2 hour Kick off with the participants two weeks in advance. By doing this, you start the lobbying process among the participants. They ideally need to find teammates to work on their project. If everybody presents their ideas to each other before the FedEx Day, people will have a catalyst to start thinking about what they will be working on.

- Have a clear start and end of the FedEx Day, e.g., from 12 PM on Thursday to 12 PM on Friday followed by a demo from 12 PM to 2 PM during lunch. Stick to these time boxes and communicate them clearly and repeatedly, also during the FedEx Day itself.
- At the start of the FedEx Day, make a final round amongst the participants, asking them what project they will be working on and with whom. By letting people personally commit to participate on a piece of paper, you make them aware of the single rule of FedEx Day: "If you participate, you demonstrate the results the next day".
- Facilitate. Make sure the company's alarm is switched off for the night, make sure enough drinks and snacks are present.
- Stick to a time box per presentation, e.g., 10 minutes per FedEx Demo.
- Do everything you can to create a relaxed setting around the demos. It is about people who worked all night on what they value most in the company.

The 2nd FedEx Day winner: Paul Kemper is very proud!

Investment

You can easily calculate the costs of a FedEx Day:

- Demo attendee, 2 hours
- Full participant, 12 hours: FedEx Day (8 hours) + FedEx Kickoff (2 hours) + demo attendee
- Organizer, 20 hours: One Day of preparation (8 hours) + full participant

You can multiply the hours times the costs per hour to find out the costs of the event. Add a budget for drinks and snacks to calculate the total investment.

Conclusion

Ideally, motivation is about self-directed devotion to improve at something that matters. A FedEx Day is about boosting motivation and creativity overnight by getting out of people's way. A FedEx Day can be used to show management that just a few people can deliver innovative, working software in only 24 hours. If they can deliver value in 24 hours, they can deliver a lot of value in a typical Scrum time box of two weeks! Organize one and find out!

If you have any questions about FedEx Days or need help organizing one, do not hesitate to [ping me on Twitter](#):

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Kind regards,

Rob van Lanen

About Rob van Lanen

T: [@robvanlanen](#) | W: [agilestudio.nl](#)

After several years of experience as Developer, Scrum Master, Product Owner and Development Manager, Rob wants to share his thoughts with the community. He is passionate about teaching the agile mindset and helping teams to build great products that end-users love. Guiding dedicated professionals to reach this goal is what makes him get up in the morning. You can read more about Rob and the services of Prowareness at [www.scrum.nl](#).

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References

[i] Edward L. Deci, Richard M. Ryan, and Richard Koestner, *"A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation"*, Phychological Bulletin 125, no. 6 (1999):659.

[ii] Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Riverhead Trade; Reprint edition (April 5, 2011), ISBN-10: 1594484805, ISBN-13: 978-1594484803