

Season 3 | Episode 8

# Engaging Employees with Bite-Size Motivation



## Rob Parsons

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## Steve Gilliland

Motivational Speaker

## Full transcript

### Rob Parsons:

Welcome to Pulse, a Paychex HR Podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

### Rob Parsons:

Hi folks, Rob Parsons here. Joining me today is Steve Gilliland. A member of the speaker hall of fame, Steve is one of the most in-demand and top-rated speakers in the world. With an appeal that transcends barriers of age, culture, even occupation, plus an interactive and very entertaining style, Steve shows audiences how to open door to success in their careers, their relationships, and their lives. Today, we're going to be talking about motivation and how you can put what he's learned to work for your company. Steve, welcome back to the podcast.

### Steve Gilliland:

It's great to be back, good to see you again, Rob.

### Rob Parsons:

Good to see you again, it's been a while. I did want to point out or just mention the last time we talked, last time we had you on the podcast, you had a quote that really stuck with me. We were just in the thick of the first lockdown, and you said, "It's not, 'It is what it is.' It is what you make it." And I just love the attitude of that phrase. How has that been working for you the past year and a half or so?

**Steve Gilliland:**

It's been working, as a matter of fact, my entire staff caught hold of it and they know that's my philosophy, so basically, the results are there. When I say "It is what you make it," we've made it, we've done a lot of digital learning with clients and we've also done a lot of virtual, but I've done a lot of in-person here to start 2022, and I had a pretty good fall with in-person. So, it's kind of a hybrid thing, some want me in-person, some want me virtually, and then others, one of the digital learning stuff that we had produced in studio.

**Rob Parsons:**

Glad you mentioned that, because you've made something new here, something that I think's going to be super valuable for everyone in our listening audience. So just tell me a little bit of a background. How did you get to your "Motivation Bites?"

**Steve Gilliland:**

Well, I know this is going to sound simplistic and I'm not saying this for any marketing reasons and I'll put my right hand up here, I'll swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But after speaking, Rob, in person for 22 years, one of the things that became really a statement after I finished speaking, I would have people that had hired me say to me, "Man, I wish we could have you every week." And of course it was fun. You know, they would smile, I would smile, and I'd say, "Well, you know, you can fly me here, you got me every week." When the pandemic started, I went down to a studio, an actual film studio, and I started to create some virtual product. I wanted to do some digital product, I wanted to be able to maybe put my signature keynotes on it.

**Steve Gilliland:**

The owner of the studio was listening in. He came in, and you know, the producers, and the camera people were there and he listened to me and he pulled me aside and said, "Hey, you want to have lunch?" And fast forward, we had lunch and sitting at that lunch, he said, "You know, everybody doesn't want 30 minutes. They don't want 45 minutes. They can't get retention from that. They can't get people to be engaged." And then he said, "You're such a storyteller. You've got great content. What if you did four to five minutes? What if you just did ..." And he literally said the word, "Just a bite, just a bite." And boy, the wheel started turning, and over the next probably two weeks I had created literally what I called "Motivation Bites." It would be four- to five-minute digital micro-learning where I would tell a story, whether it be funny, inspirational, but something to engage them, something that would make an employee at any company, sit there and go, "Wow, liked it, loved it. This is great, just enough."

**Steve Gilliland:**

You didn't just bore them to death with a "Here we go, here we go, now we're going to share the screen, now we're going to ..." So it was one of those things of just a quick bite, so that's how it was born. We shot the first, Rob, we shot the first half dozen, we didn't like them, the producer didn't like them, actually the owner who I had lunch with, didn't like, and then he said, "You got to be more you," which was tell stories, be funny. And so that's what we did because the stories connect with the audience and it really keeps them engaged throughout the presentation. And I think it's one of those things that when you connect with them emotionally — and that's what my stories do — they're in. And then before they know it, as some have said, "Oh, it goes too quick, five minutes is like, bam."

**Rob Parsons:**

Love it. And, "Oh, I accidentally learned something during that time." So-

**Steve Gilliland:**

Yeah, exactly, exactly.

**Rob Parsons:**

You've got 52 of these now, how did you go about choosing the topics? You've got a huge range of topics you're covering with these Motivation Bites.

**Steve Gilliland:**

Well, I've got a list and it's called My Advocates List, and you mean, people can Google it. If you Google up advocate marketing, there is such a thing. So what I've done with the advocates that have come along my path over the last two decades is I've bounced things like this off of them. So I took clients, people that are fans of mine, and I said, "I'm going to create these Motivation Bites." And I literally had 140 topics. And I said, "Would you rank what you would consider to be the top 52." Boy, I'll tell you what, the cool thing was, 30 were, everybody had the same 30. So I got all these responses back, everybody had the same 30. Then it was, like, okay, 12 people had this one, nine people had ... But it was kind of cool because when it all came out, there was about 47 topics that I felt like, "Wow, everybody wants these."

**Steve Gilliland:**

And then of course the last five, that's one of those things of ... I said to my wife, I go, "Let's just, you tell me." So we kind of sat one morning having coffee and that's how it happened. But they're all relevant to the workplace. And I call them performance essentials in the workplace. What do employees, what do leaders need? And it's just one of those things where you look at the topics and you start to say, "Action, adaptability, character, respect, vision," lot of things that people may not think about, especially some of the frontline workers, but then all of a sudden it relates to them, and they go, "Whoa, he's talking about me."

**Rob Parsons:**

I love that. And I love that you mentioned this isn't just for leaders, this is really for employees. So is that the real reason? Or maybe you could tell me all the ways clients are finding this so important right now? I get it, but you've probably got a host of benefits that you've been hearing back from your customers on this.

**Steve Gilliland:**

I just spoke last Thursday and Friday in Morehead, Kentucky, and one of the things that that client said — it was healthcare — and one of the things I did, their leadership development Institute. So I had 100 leaders in this facility. I spoke to them and I actually spoke a couple of days to them. I did one topic one day, one topic the next day. And they said, "Oh my gosh, it would be great." And I actually said, "Let me interrupt you." I knew where they were headed with this, Rob, so what I said to them was, I said, "What you'd like is all of your employees, all 1250 to be hearing the same message." So the cool thing about it is when we recorded them, I was very conscientious of who the audience would be.

**Steve Gilliland:**

It wasn't just going to be leaders, it wasn't just going to be frontline, it wasn't going to be ... It was going to be an employee who is interacting and working amongst other employees, whether that be on a loading dock, whether that be in a lab, whether that be in an emergency room, you know, as a super, no matter what the setting was. And here's the thing: I've had trucking companies; one that's become really popular are school districts, because they were able to engage their staff and their teachers and keep them ... The morale sometimes, they're getting bombarded from everywhere, and I'm not going to pick on the media. All I'm going to say is it just comes at them so many different ways and it fans the flames and before, you know it, boom: the culture, the negativity, the low morale. So that's kind of how it all started.

**Steve Gilliland:**

And that's really why it's really picked up, is, there are groups — you can engage the entire company. Think about it: a credit union, think about a credit union that is spread out and has 12 branches. Think about a credit union that has 15 branches. When do they ... They only get together when? They get together maybe yesterday, ML King Day, Martin Luther King Day, they get together President's Day, they get together maybe on Veteran's Day because they can get it ... But other than that, this gives them an opportunity to engage them every single week.

**Rob Parsons:**

I love it and I love the consistency, I mean, literally getting everybody on the same page. I love the quick-hit format that the accessibility of these stories ... I just, I think this quick hit micro-learning in video form is just a fantastic idea. What advice would you give to our listeners? If they wanted to try to put together a program like this for their own company, if they wanted to speak to maybe ... I know, Paychex. We have a very unique culture and our HR teams would want to do something like this for our story, or they would want to do something like this for our technology. What advice would you give? What were some of the roadblocks or what were some of the challenges you have and what could you tell people to give them a leg up if they wanted to undertake micro-learning on their own?

**Steve Gilliland:**

I think one of the biggest challenges is what we just said, but we didn't drill down into, and that is making it applicable for the whole. It's accessible for the whole, but what does a C-suite person get out of this? What does a supervisor get out of this? And then what does the person who is actually interfacing with a [customer]... So when I did it, the challenge was — and I'll level with you — I spent time writing script. I spent time making sure that when I said something, it was applicable. Also the culture piece. I mean, you want to foster a very positive workplace atmosphere. So, as you're creating these, the culture piece is really something that you have to be aware of because not every culture is the same.

**Steve Gilliland:**

I mean, not every leadership style is the same. So again, now you're not going to be the answer to everyone. And I think that's the other thing, even if you look at Paychex, you look at the diverse group of employees that work there. Some of them, you're just going to have to look at it and say, "Hey, maybe this isn't for everyone." But when you're talking... I'm going to give you an example. When you're talking about communication, everybody has an opinion on what that means. What I tried to do — and here's the challenge — was to give them something that they haven't heard. Everybody's read the same things. Everybody has said, "You got to speak to be understood. You got to listen to understand." All of the things that you know, what don't they know? What haven't they heard? What's the communication now because we're doing so much of it virtually? What are the challenges?

**Steve Gilliland:**

So you tie in maybe what the communication challenges are when you're on a zoom meeting call, because that makes it more relevant to the listener and the employee who says, "Boy, that was good, man. I never thought of that. I never realized ..." If you're just going to talk about communication in the same general generic format everybody else does, to me, you just wasted one of the 52. You need to take that on. I mean — and that's what I used to say — I got to take these on, man. I got to talk about relationships in a whole different way, whole different way, and that's pretty much the challenge you have because there's so much ... And I don't want to even say it's the diversity, it's just where we're at in a society today, the way we all view things. I mean, perspective? Wow. There used to be two sides to every story. Rob, there's four→

**Rob Parsons:**

At least.

**Steve Gilliland:**

— at least. So that's the challenge.

**Rob Parsons:**

And I think that's a great point is, conceptually? Brilliant. Executionally? Be ready to put the work in, be ready to dig in, and if you're not going to do it well, then don't bother doing it.

**Steve Gilliland:**

This was a six-month project. When you just said that, my brain went to, yeah, if you're not willing to pay the price on this, this was a six-month project doing this. And that was just not even ... When I think about all the editing and all the B-footage and all ... I mean, when you see the videos, you know there's a lot of B-roll into this. I mean, there was a lot of consumption of time and, just one of the last ones we shot, they had to go to a theater and they had to take two cameras, three actors. They had to reenact the story I told, but when they did, I sat there, watched it and went, I'm laughing at my own, going, THAT is brilliant. Just the way they put my story and made it come to life. And I know that the person viewing it's going to be going, "Oh, my, that is hilarious."

**Rob Parsons:**

So great, we've got just a few minutes here. I would love to spend this time talking about Weaving Dreams, if you don't mind.

**Steve Gilliland:**

Weaving Dreams, when my wife and I, in 2016, we sat down one morning, we were having coffee, and we said, "You know, we give a lot of money to a lot of causes, it comes out of our company. I would like to get a little bit more formal and create a foundation." So my wife and I created what is called Gilliland Foundation. And we wanted to focus on a couple of areas specifically: one was impoverished. I know I can only speak for why I live in North Carolina here. Man, you can go in one section and within a mile or two miles, you're in a section that you're just shaking your head going, wow. And I'm very good friends with our superintendent of schools here. And he started talking about the impoverished children, he started talking. So I said to my wife, we both agreed: the impoverished.

**Steve Gilliland:**

And then I don't think there's anything that just tugs in my heart more than a child with cancer. I think cancer, period, I hate it. I just, ughh, hate it. But when I see a child that got cheated, and when I see a child that is young and struggling ... I met a woman who had access to what's called the floor at Children's Hospital here in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. And what she said was, she said, "It's not just the children that battle the cancer, it is the siblings of those children and the parents of what they endure." And when I got a whole different perspective, I just said, man. So the Weaving Dreams, what we created, Rob, within our foundation, we had had a 91-year-old woman that loomed beanie hats. And she's a good friend of my wife. She said, "I just wish I knew what to do with the hats."

**Steve Gilliland:**

I know it sounds simple, but when you're talking to a guy like me, I said, "I know what we should do with the hats." So we have literally given to impoverished. We just sent one, actually 200 hats to an Indian reservation in South Dakota because they said, "We are in such need ... The weather, the children, the adults. We need coats, we need hats." The minute they said hats, boom, we're going to send. So we sent 10 boxes of 20 hats to them. And then what we do is we sell the beanie hats for \$10, we ask for donations, but for every beanie hat we sell, we give away two of them to children's hospitals, so that, if they're going through the cancer treatment ...

**Steve Gilliland:**

And we get special requests, I know Paychex is up there in Rochester, New York, and I know every geographic area, and of course, shout out to the Buffalo Bills, for any Bills fans up in that area. But my thing here is, I'm in the heart of college, so we get requests from families that'll say, "Our daughter's going through cancer, and she loves Duke, or she loves, you know, Wake Forest." So the ladies that loom the hats will do one. And we literally have given thousands of beanie hats to impoverished children, impoverished adults as well, and also children battling cancer.

**Rob Parsons:**

It's just tremendous, Steve. That's a great story and just all-around great information today. Thank you so much for joining the podcast.

**Steve Gilliland:**

You are so welcome. Anytime.

**Rob Parsons:**

And thank you to our listeners for joining. If you're interested in Weaving Dreams, in helping out, please visit [gillilandfoundation.org](http://gillilandfoundation.org) to learn how you can help. And to learn more about Motivation Bites, you can go to [stevegilliland.com](http://stevegilliland.com) and that's G-I-L-L-I-L-A-N-D. And remember, we'd love to hear what you want from this podcast. Please visit [payx.me/pulsetopics](http://payx.me/pulsetopics) to submit guest and topic ideas. That's P-A-Y-X.M-E/pulsetopics. Thank you, all, and please stay happy and healthy.

**Announcer:**

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