



21st Century Ideas on Motivation: Think **Pink!**

Author and lecturer Daniel Pink believes we can – and should – do better to challenge students into successful engagement. At school, at home and in the workplace, we need to help people move toward three essential components of motivation: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Since the overwhelming appeal of his groundbreaking book, *A Whole New Mind*, I wondered what other grand idea would interest Pink. The answer is his recent book, *Drive*, in which he compiles decades of research on intrinsic motivation and weaves his own ideas to discuss the mismatch between what we know and what we practice. The result is his belief that today's many challenges need a paradigm shift in understanding and using motivation techniques for the 21st century.

In February, many of us heard Daniel Pink speak at the invitation of Friends Select School. With passion and panache, he presented his theories peppered with anecdotal stories in his casual and humorous style that I especially could appreciate – folksy Ohio. The book is a pleasant surprise: an easy read full of research, experiments, stories and suggestions for all – business, education, parents and organizations. While Pink is aligned with current research, he takes the reader on a journey of the development of motivation theories from such notable researchers as the University of Pennsylvania's Martin Seligman and the influential Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to Carol Dweck, Howard Gardner and Teresa Amabile's work on creativity and the future at Harvard University.

Revisiting motivation ideas can help us help students understand better their paths to success. Here at PC, we are on the right track, but there is more information to help students apply these three theories.

Autonomy

The first of Pink's theories is believing in autonomy – that self-direction works. He reminds us that external rewards and/or a punishment techniques are unreliable because they are only effective some of the time. External rewards can diminish performance, and can become addictive, can contribute to short-term thinking and can even encourage shortcuts that may lead to cheating and unethical behavior.

It is helpful that we motivate students by providing choices in their work to help them move toward autonomy, even though we must direct them with external conditions of accountability. Research confirms the link between autonomy, or acting with choice, and overall well-being. Autonomous motivation may result in greater understanding, good grades, higher persistence and productivity, and less burnout. We need to continue to inspire and promote "self direction."

Mastery

Pink's second theory is about mastery. His thinking is aligned with Carol Dweck's research on the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset. Pink also has a section titled "Mastery is a Pain," which definitely pertains to many of our students. Mastery requires sustained effort, often on tasks that are not pleasing or instantly rewarding but necessary. Convincing students that they are "making progress" over the rough spots is the key to keeping them motivated. Such struggles may actually make them smarter. Like Dweck, Pink encourages us to

Pink Paper Summary

Think Pink!

- Motivation techniques must change for the 21st century
- Daniel Pink writes shares research, experiments, stories and suggestions which challenge motivational techniques
- Self direction works!
- Motivate by providing choices
- External rewards and/or punishment as motivational techniques are unreliable
- Promote effort - to accomplish effort
- The elite don't just work hard - they work much, much harder to master their craft
- "The joy is in the pursuit more than the realization."
- The purpose motive places equal importance on profits and maximizing purpose by instituting and practicing worthy goals, policies and actions for the greater good.



promote effort; our gifts will not alone lead us to success. Psychologists who have looked at very successful careers have discovered that innate talent plays a smaller role and preparation the larger role. Elite performers, whether in sports arts or science, didn't just work hard at their craft; they worked much, much harder than others. Detailed studies reveal that no matter how talented we are, the great successes are related to how hard we have worked toward mastering the skills.

Pink describes mastery as an asymptote, an algebraic concept. His theory is that mastery is impossible to fully attain; hence, the asymptote – a straight line that a curve approaches but never reaches. With many of our students, this concept can be both frustrating and enticing. Students want immediate rewards for their work and often have unrealistic goals that stifle the process they need to follow to attain success. If we could only assure them of the following admonition by Pink: “The joy is in the pursuit more than the realization. In the end mastery attracts precisely because mastery alludes.”

Finding Purpose

The third theory of motivation is related to finding real purpose in life. The “purpose motive” simply, but notably, places equal importance on profits and maximizing purpose by instituting and practicing worthy goals, policies and actions for the greater good.

Making a difference matters! Pink includes many practical suggestions for parents and educators, many resources he feels are essential and conversation guides to “think Pink.” It might be worthwhile to explore some of these insights and seek ways to incorporate some of these practical shifts to continually motivate ourselves and our students. The following are some ideas for motivating ourselves and our students:

- Look daily for small measures of improvement; ask yourself “Was I better today than yesterday?”
- Set some smaller and, also, some larger goals.
- Encourage deliberate, focused practice.
- Change your performance by reaching a little higher.
- Seek critical feedback: Focus relentlessly on where you need help.
- Take time for personal exploration.
- Prepare for an exhausting process if you want to improve.
- Turn homework into thoughtful, purposeful “home learning.”
- Devote an entire school day to problem-solving a current issue.
- Create your own motivational saying, card or poster.

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