

BOOK REVIEW:

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us By Daniel Pink

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EDU 5571 / Fall 2014

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

By Daniel Pink

In *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink sets out to expose the disconnect between how society typically tries to motivate people to perform and what science has proven actually motivates them. Based on the results of studies performed over the past 60+ years, in multiple locations, with subjects of varying age, gender, education level, and cultures, Pink presents the theory that our historical method of encouraging performance by offering rewards and tangible incentives is effective only when people are required to perform rote, mechanical tasks. For tasks that require creativity, cognitive insight, or higher-level, complex reasoning, rewards actually reduced efficiency and production.

Pink suggests that people have internal drives that, when encouraged, enable them to be more successful, productive, and happier in their work. Those drives include: the desire to direct their own lives (autonomy), to succeed and get better at something (mastery), and a desire to make a difference around them (purpose). When these three drives are tapped into in the workplace, at school, or at home, people are more successful. When they are not addressed; when the motivation comes from above or without, even in the form of rewards, the individual's internal drive is not engaged and productivity is hampered.

As *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* was written primarily to address employee performance in the workplace, Pink uses an industrial analogy that likens our historical views of motivation to versions of a computer's operating system. Motivation 1.0 refers to the basic

drive to fulfill our most fundamental, biological, survival needs. Motivation 2.0 is what Pink refers to as the “carrot and stick”. “If I do *X*, then I get *Y*”.

Motivation 2.0 is the “operating system” typically used in today’s businesses, schools, governments, and general society to get people to comply. If you come to work on-time, you get paid. If you are late, your pay might get docked. If you get at least 65% of the questions right on your tests, you’ll pass your class. If you are not a good test taker, you may fail and have to repeat the class.

However, if Motivation 2.0 worked, we would all be successful if rewarded. Everyone would come to work, do a good job, and be rewarded (or reinforced) with their paycheck and bonuses. If Motivation 2.0 worked, every student in every school would work hard, do homework, and study in pursuit of the best grades.

In the same vein, Motivation 2.0 would assume that, having no incentives, people would refrain from tasks or activities for which they were not rewarded. But people play instruments in their spare time. They learn languages, garden, fix cars, knit, build models, and choose to do a host of other time consuming, often complex activities on their own time with no extrinsic reward in sight. More telling is that many people do things, in their spare time, that *could* be marketable. People develop free websites, found or support public resources, start successful businesses, and actually choose to forgo the potential of monetary gain.

Pink bases Motivation 3.0 on this phenomenon. Motivation 3.0 says that, when people feel like they are paid “enough”, when the carrot and stick mentality is taken away, and when they are given the room, time, and opportunity, their drive to work harder, to perform better, and to engage more thoroughly in a task will kick in simply because it is their choice to do it (filling the drive for

autonomy), they'll want to do a good job and be successful (fulfilling the drive for mastery), and they'll feel that their efforts make a difference (fulfilling their drive for purpose).

Throughout the book, Pink returns again and again to the simple concept that people will perform better if their drive to do well comes from within. Once the if/then scenarios come into play, they are working for something external and although they will go through the motions, their autonomy, mastery, and purpose drives are not utilized. Although these drives still exist within, people watching the clock and hurrying to be on time to work so their pay isn't docked are not driving to work thinking about a project they are working on, or would like to work on once they get there. Students worried about getting a 65% on the exam are too busy trying to cram facts before the test to be open to the concepts offered in classes, and motivated to do further reading at home on a school topic that caught their interest.

Pink acknowledges that there are limitations to the application of Motivation 3.0. There are many tasks necessary in society that require rote, mechanical skills that don't require or tap into Motivation 3.0. As a result, individuals in these positions do well with rewards and incentives. An assembly line in a factory, for example, may require that each person do only their piece of a larger job and a per-piece incentive might generate more product equaling, for that business, increased productivity.

One of the things about this book that occurred to me was how much Pink's writings about motivation reminded me of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes' writings about the natural state of man (Motivation 1.0?) and social contract theory (Motivation 2.0?) over 350 years ago! Although the overall thesis of each is totally opposite (Pink recommending less direct supervision, while Hobbes was in support of an absolute monarchy), Motivation 1.0 matches Hobbes' description of man in the

“natural state” in which purely basic desires ruled behavior. Motivation 2.0 is similar to Hobbes’ “social contract theory”. To protect my stuff, I make a deal with you. “If you leave my stuff alone, then I’ll leave your stuff alone.” It’s not that I have any desire or drive to cooperate with others, it’s just that my reward for leaving your stuff alone is that you’ll leave my stuff alone. The comparison between Hobbes and Pink here is that, although in my 2.0, social contract I agreed to leave you stuff alone, I’m not going to bring it in out of the rain for you, or stop someone else from taking it. That’s not my “job”.

Governments were built upon this. We call them laws. If you obey the law, you get to live in peace. If you break the law, you are punished. Simple carrot. Simple stick. But where Hobbes assumes that the carrot (or more accurately, the stick) were necessary to make people do the right thing, Pink suggests that, when left alone, people generally want to do the right thing of their own volition! However different, from Hobbes’ 1651 *Leviathan* and Pink’s 2009 *Drive*, the fascinating thing is that philosophers and researchers have been examining what motivates people for over 350 years!

The second thing that occurred to me while reading this books was how the teaching profession has historically changed in the opposite direction of Pink’s “Operating Systems” progression. In the past 20 years that I’ve been teaching, it seems like we’ve gone from Motivation 3.0 to Motivation 2.0, particularly teaching in special education.

I hold teaching certifications from 1993-1996 in both general education (elementary N,K-6) and English 7-12) and special education (N, K-12). My course work for each were significantly different. For both of my general education certifications, my coursework consisted almost exclusively of subject area content, one course in “The Exceptional Child”, and student teaching.

My special education coursework, however, had little subject content at all and was focused almost exclusively on the students with courses such as “Teaching students with Learning Disabilities” and “Teaching Students with Emotional Disabilities”. Although the special education coursework has changed since then with the help of NCLB, Integrated Co-Teaching (ITC) classes in my high school are still described to the parents as having two teachers, one subject area teacher and a special educator for student support. This is despite the fact that, in my particular ICT class, I have 17 years more experience teaching earth science than my “subject area”, gen ed. co-teacher!

When I started teaching in 1996, there were levels of graduation options for students. There were the “regents kids” and the “local” diploma kids. For special education students in self-contained classes, their curricular requirements were, like the special education training and certification at the time, purely student based. Special education teachers at the high school level did not have to have a subject area certification and, if they did, there was no guarantee that they would teach that subject. With a BA in English and 6 credits short of an MA in Teaching Writing, I was hired to teach special education, self-contained Earth Science “Skills”. Although I had no training in teaching earth science, the “skills” designation meant that I didn’t have to teach to the regents exam, but could, instead, teach the concepts to the students in any way I found successful, and “test” them accordingly.

I enjoyed every day of teaching and couldn’t wait for the next! The weather unit found us outside swinging sling psychrometers and checking rain gauges we'd placed the week before. The geology unit had us out in the schoolyard collecting samples and studying weathering and erosion right there outside the window! The students loved earth science and I loved teaching it. Like most of my colleagues, I spent many unpaid hours and countless personal dollars coming up with lesson

plans that excited me as much as I hoped they would excite the kids. I was shopping for curriculum at garden centers and Home Depot and functioning purely at Motivation 3.0!

With NCLB, “my” kids are now “Regents kids” and I can no longer teach earth science using the earth as a classroom. Now I have to teach to a test, trying to get my kinesthetically geared students to understand things purely through readings and concepts. Worse, I find myself counting years until retirement, thinking about FAS and hating that I now spend the time I used to use planning exciting lesson doing paperwork, data collection, testing, assembling APPR artifacts, and attending staff development meetings that rarely even mention students. Daniel Pink would no doubt diagnose my current operating system firmly at Motivation 2.0.

As idealistic as I am, while reading *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, I wondered if a society that is so ingrained in and founded on Motivation 2.0, could find a way to pull back the rewards that people are used to striving for, even with the promise of more autonomy, purpose, and opportunity for mastery, without resulting a type of pendulum swing reaction. So many people only know Motivation 2.0. They go to work for the paycheck, teach for July and August, and graduate high school with test scores on their transcripts but requiring remedial support in even our community colleges.

Current research in leadership offers hope for a shift to (or back to) Motivation 3.0 and shows that the only way that we can move from Motivation 2.0 to 3.0 is from the top. In *What Makes A Leader*, Daniel Goleman talks about Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the first skills Goleman lists that enable leaders to maximize performance are self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation. In *What Makes An Effective Executive?* Peter Drucker says that an effective executive asks what needs to be done and focus on opportunities rather than problems. In

The Work of Leadership, Heifetz & Laurie talk about “giving the work back to the employees” by supporting rather than controlling them, by encouraging risk-taking, and helping (not bribing) people to recognize that they contain the solution. They also caution leaders not to silence “creative deviants”. Most notable and, I believe most applicable in comparison to Pink’s book, is Jim Collins’ *Level 5 Leadership* in which Level 5 leaders are described as those who “rely on inspired standards to motivate” with a people first, strategy second philosophy. These are all Motivation 3.0 skills and prove that change from Motivation 2.0 to 3.0 can be possible. But it will have to begin at the top.

We need Level 5 leaders who can create the environments in which individuals feel supported, appreciated, nurtured, and free to create, explore, and invest themselves toward mastery and purpose.

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