

## Drive: Correct Motivation Is Key in Developing Youth

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So far, we have seen how “practice makes perfect” in *Talent is Overrated* and discovered the importance of developing right-brain capabilities in *A Whole New Mind*. In my final installment of articles on the subject of guiding our youth into financial and professional adulthood, I will take a look at another important question: “What motivates our children to do well?”

For the answer, we will once again rely on a book by Daniel Pink: *Drive, The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*.

Essentially, motivation can be thought of as a reason to act in a certain way. Synonyms for it include “motive,” “inspiration” and “inducement.” As parents, we have the delicate task of nudging our children in the right direction without being “pushy,” which often can have the opposite effect we desire. But, like all deeply motivated adults, I believe our children also long to be a part of a cause greater than themselves. As parents, how do we cultivate this desire and combine it with their talents and intellectual make-up (right-brain, left-brain) to promote their success and equip them to make significant contributions to society?

First, we must understand the three types of motivation. Pink outlines them in this manner:

- **Motivation 1.0** – Survival or subsistence.
- **Motivation 2.0** – “Carrots and sticks.” This refers to rewards for good behavior and punishment for bad behavior. This is a long-held behavior management “operating system.”
- **Motivation 3.0** – Concern with intrinsic rewards (versus extrinsic rewards) and the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself.

Motivation 1.0 is a given. Motivation 2.0 deals primarily with the extrinsic, the external system of reward and punishment that’s familiar to us all in our capacity either as recipients or as the agent of its application. Given the fact that we all seek to gain pleasure and avoid pain, this extrinsic system serves a valuable purpose at times. For example, from an economic standpoint, during the Industrial Revolution, the goal was to get factories to function at an efficient level. This meant motivating workers. The “carrot and stick” behavior management approach was useful in convincing the manufacturing organization to run smoothly. If you want to improve performance and productivity, you reward the good and punish the bad. It’s pretty simple.

With children, a classic “carrot” is to offer monetary rewards for good grades; a classic “stick” is to ground them for bad ones. This was an almost universal technique during my school-age years, and it continues today as well. The trouble is, according to Pink and the research he cites, that these types of incentives not only ignore the intrinsic motivation which will serve our kids better in the long run, they also can diminish performance, crush creativity and become addictive. None of these things are what we want to teach our children if the goal is to equip them for long-term success.

On the other hand, under the rubric of Motivation 3.0 – or an intrinsic “operating system” – you will characteristically find more opportunities for creativity and right-brain undertakings. But most importantly, Motivation 3.0 gives us the best opportunity to experience what Pink calls *flow*. Flow is the state of *optimal* challenge.

First of all, it is important that Pink uses the word “optimal” instead of “maximum.” Optimal connotes a “best in class” standard with more discoveries and improvements to come. A commitment to life-long learning is implied. But what does “being in flow” really mean? Pink explains:

“The highest, most satisfying experiences in people’s lives were when they were in *flow*. ...In flow, goals are clear. You have to reach the top of the mountain, hit the ball across the net, or mold the clay just right. Feedback is immediate.... Most important, in flow, the relationship between what a person had to do and what he could do was perfect. The challenge wasn’t too easy. Nor was it too difficult. It was a notch or two beyond his current abilities.”

Furthermore, environments that promote three key elements – autonomy, mastery and purpose – are most likely to foster a state of flow.

*Autonomy* can be the antidote to mediocrity, Pink says. It is not the same as independence. Rather, it means acting with choice while still being interdependent with others. “Autonomous motivation promotes greater conceptual understanding, better grades, enhanced persistence in sporting [or other extracurricular] activities, less burnout, higher productivity, and a greater feeling of psychological wellbeing.” With my own children, my wife and I practice oversight without micromanagement. For example, we might tell them: “You should start studying now for that history test next Tuesday.” Then we let the chips fall where they may. If they decide not to take our advice, they’ll soon come to understand on their own the futility of “cramming” for a test.

*Mastery* is “the desire to get better and better at something that matters.” This can mean making better grades, reaching a career goal or improving a relationship. The feeling that comes from mastering something increases productivity and satisfaction. This can be as simple as providing positive reinforcement for a child with, for example, an interest in art. Perhaps you complement them on the progress they are making with a sketch or painting. My wife and I are not overly concerned with *which* interests our children pursue as long as they pursue one. If we see that it matters to them, then it matters to us.

Finally, *Purpose* refers to “belonging to a cause greater than ourselves.” Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says, “Purpose provides activation energy for living.” It is the ultimate motivator, and parents who can harness its power in the lives of their children will do them a great service. Team sports are ideal for teaching this lesson. But even if your children have no athletic proclivity, finding any organization they can be a part of at a young age will foster a sense of purpose in their lives.

What can we garner from our time together over the last three months? Here it is summarized in three crucial points: 1) having a commitment to applying our talents through disciplined practice (*Talent is Overrated*) is extremely important, 2) developing a right brain-left brain balance (*A Whole New Mind*) is a critical component to excelling in the new economy, and 3) seeking to promote and create an environment of *autonomy, mastery and purpose*, leading to a “state of *flow*,” will

benefit us, our friends and co-workers. Most of all, it will benefit future generations – our children – as we all face the challenges and seize the extraordinary opportunities that lie ahead.

### **About Jim Whiddon, Wealth Advisor and Director of Investor Enrichment for the BAM ALLIANCE**

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