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Can One Person Increase the Motivation in Another Person?

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The answer is yes, of course, right? People motivate other people. After all, what about coaches and inspirational speakers? They are paid to motivate other people to do great things.

But ask the parent who would like to see a better report card, the boss who is sure to catch several employees off task at any give time, or the spouse who hates picking up someone else's dirty laundry from the bathroom floor and you will hear that motivating others is IMPOSSIBLE!

Consider the two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic:

Intrinsic motivation originates from within the individual. It is a very powerful source of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is behind all of our attempts to learn and master new skills from our very birth. An infant will reach out and grasp a finger. Next comes walking, talking, riding a bike, all the things children are anxious to accomplish.

Extrinsic motivators are the rewards and punishments that come from the outside world. Play video games instead of doing homework, suffer embarrassment in class the next day. Earn a trophy for first place in a competition for high performance, win the admiration of others. There is one important fact about extrinsic motivators however, they are short-term fixes only. The desired behavior will probably disappear when the threat is gone (or forgotten) or the promise has either been delivered or denied.

Instead of relying on extrinsic motivators when attempting to get people to behave in ways that you think are reasonable, foster the factors that nurture those powerful intrinsic motivators. What are the intrinsic motivators?

- Success and pride of accomplishment
- An understanding of the importance in applying the desired behavior

That's a pretty short and easy list. So how do you go about adding sunshine, water and nutrients to these natural seeds of personal growth? Here is the method:

- Set goals
- Assign responsibility
- Recognize progress
- Develop empathy
- Create a conducive environment
- Contribute to positive health habits

SET GOALS

1) Decide. 2) Create an affirmative statement. 3) Write it down. 4) Be clear about your reasons for wanting it. 5) Set a date for accomplishing the goal.

Read any motivational book and, when the subject of goal setting comes up, you will always see this formula.

The obvious reason? It is effective! Have a family meeting and present some ideas on making progress in areas of importance. Now create a statement that expresses the desired goal in an affirmative manner. (To state a goal in the affirmative, you say it as if it is already accomplished.) If you want to spend less time watching television and more time on responsibilities, projects and hobbies, you can say, "Our family devotes one hour each evening for taking care of responsibilities and spending creative time on hobbies and projects". Now commit the goal to paper. Why do you have to write it down? The writing process involves more motor skills and imprints the idea more clearly on the brain. Next step is to assign relevancy to the goal. "Better use of our time will reduce stress for the entire family. We can use the extra time to take care of some chores that usually end up getting rushed, such as picking out clothes to wear the next day, or fixing lunches." Then pin a date on the accomplishment, "We will start on Monday and meet again Saturday to talk about the different ways we used our extra time".

ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY

There are some very important rules to follow when delegating responsibility in a way that fosters intrinsic motivation rather than relying on extrinsic rewards or punishments.

- Allow for choice
- Allow for individual styles
- Allow for a learning curve

In our goal of spending less time in the evening in front of the television and more time reducing stress and pursuing creative endeavors, we can apply these allowances. Obviously, each person would be responsible for picking out tomorrow's clothes, but other duties can be handed around. Make a list of other jobs that could be shared by everyone and then work out a fair plan of accomplishment. Remember the secret of presenting "yes" or "yes" options. "Danny, do you want your day to clean the bathroom to be Wednesday or Friday?" "Would you

rather make sandwiches or fold the laundry?"

Once a job is delegated it now belongs to the responsible person. No breathing down necks, or coaching from the sidelines. Make sure the proper tools are available, instructions are clearly given and then walk away. If the bathroom mirror is cleaned with a mop the first time, oh well. The intrinsic goals of the individual will allow the necessary skills to develop naturally. You contribute to the learning curve by affectively applying the next step.

RECOGNIZE PROGRESS

Many people enjoy using charts and graphs to track progress. They can be very effective. I urge you not to rely too heavily on them, however because they tend to make us think of extrinsic rewards. "What do I get when I have a star in every square?"

What works best is a thank you with a statement of worth about the action. "Thanks for picking up the living room. It puts me in such a good mood to live in a neat home." (Remember the two intrinsic motivators, pride and importance of action?) Or, a verbal pat on the back. "Now that your homework is done and your head is the size of a watermelon, what fun thing are you going to enjoy?"

Remember to be sporadic with your compliments and praise. A compliment delivered with every action sounds insincere. Never forget the reinforcing power of a smile or a hug.

DEVELOP EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to feel what another person is feeling and is the foundation of intrinsic motivator number two: an understanding of the importance in applying the desired behavior. Years of teaching elementary students gave me a clear understanding of the need to teach children empathy. From the charismatic manipulator, to the bully, to the social outcast, not being able to identify with other people's feelings can lead to problems.

Talk about your feelings with each other often. Always remember, however never to assign blame to another person when expressing an emotion. Instead of saying, "You made me so mad when I was late for work because you overslept!" a better way to build empathy would be to say, "Once the clock gets past 8:20 I start getting nervous about being late for work. My stomach gets acidic and I can almost hear my boss yelling at me again. I sure would appreciate it if you would be downstairs by 8:15." You have given your reasons on many different levels of comprehension: the visual image of the clock, the physical sensation in your stomach, the sound of an angry boss.

CREATE A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT

Above all else, model motivated behavior. That one thing in itself will motivate others beyond anything else you do.

Designate your home as a caring community. "Everyone who lives here supports each other." Don't tolerate teasing or other forms of meanness in your home.

Another important factor in keeping the atmosphere of your home uplifting is to limit complaining. Many of us are in the habit of coming home and letting off steam about the idiots we must face each day. That old homily, "Leave your troubles on the doorstep" should not be forgotten. Consider the effect on a child's motivation to grow up and enter the work world when he or she continuously hears the adults complaining about their jobs.

CONTRIBUTE TO POSTIVE HEALTH HABITS

Eat right, drink lots of water and get plenty of exercise. When you feel good physically, it is so much easier to be enthusiastic and cheerful!

Use one of your self-improvement evenings each week to take a walk outside. Wear your intelligent caps while you are on your walk and talk with each other about the things you encounter. I'll bet you can teach each other a lot.

Have an energy snack available when you are working or creating at home. Slice fruit and cheese and serve with a fortified, whole grain cracker. You are supplying vitamins, calcium and fiber. One of best fibers for the digestive system is the pectin found in apples. Float apple slices in ice water with a spritz of lemon juice and they won't turn brown.

CONCLUSION

The final word is consistency. If you are determined to reach your goals, follow through. So, good luck! Apply these concepts and you will have a happier, healthier family!

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