

The strange thing about motivation ... Carrots taste funny.

By Lee Friend

Everyone is familiar with the carrot and stick motivation analogy. The carrot and stick approach involves a person being encouraged to work ever harder to complete a desired function and is rewarded for achieving set benchmarks without necessarily ever achieving the result.

There are some who suggest the carrot might be doing more harm than good
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The carrot is often used as a symbol of motivation or the prize at the end of a designated journey.
A predefined arrangement with the performer realising correct behaviour at the point of receiving their reward.

In the modern world, carrots come in many forms across many different industries. Often financial, shiny, tangible goodies to reinforce our journey and tell us we are on the right track of pre defined behaviour. This form of motivation is from an external source, the reward is given to fuel the engine to turn the wheels of activity. As a source of energy it's efficient and available, one tangible reward can quite simply replace another to jump start the next leg of the journey, one would assume.



Sounds fair enough then, businesses have used the same methods via commission-based incentives and rewards schemes as has the learning process, a solution to get the job done..... now here is the thing and its not carrot shaped, more like a spanner.

There has been many studies trying to determine whether an incentivised task is in fact achieved quicker and more effectively. Economists from M.I.T even attempted to shed light on the accepted social science of external motivation in the form of incentives. The clever clogs from M.I.T devised three games involving a scale of incentivised tasks, the results might come as a bit of a surprise.

They certainly came as a surprise to the London School of Economics. So much so they conducted their own study and I quote... "we find that financial incentives result in a negative impact on overall performance", compounding MIT's findings "even for rudimentary cognitive skill, a larger reward led to poorer performance". I've never liked carrots and they definitely don't make you see any better in the darkness of unsolved solutions!

So, the solution to motivation is not to motivate with external, tangible rewards? No, not quite.

Motivation

A reason for behaving or acting in a certain way

Incentive

A thing that is meant to help someone achieve or encourages someone to do something

MIT

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a private research university in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Intrinsic

Belonging naturally

Desire

A strong feeling of wanting something or wishing something to happen

Pre installed

A component or behaviour pre-loaded into someone's character

External motivation is still proven to be useful in **tasks involving little cognitive thought**. Simple tasks (probably the more boring ones) with narrow goals and a solution staring right at you respond best to external reward. Sometimes this reward is the only way to get someone to complete a task they didn't want to do.

Learning or creating something new, taking a product to the next level or pushing someone's tennis ability is not a simple task for the performer. It is highly cognitive at first and the **solution is nearly always on the periphery of thought or skill**. An external reward used in this environment proves a distraction to the task in hand and is likely to have a negative affect to the performance and outcome. The person focuses on the reward more than the learning. In competitive situations many see their performance drop. Could this be related to what they see as their reward? Have you heard of the phrase "I won the warm-up".....? The phrase suggests the individual played better when the points were **not** counted. Possibly the focus of point winning was a hinderance and the point was their misplaced reward?

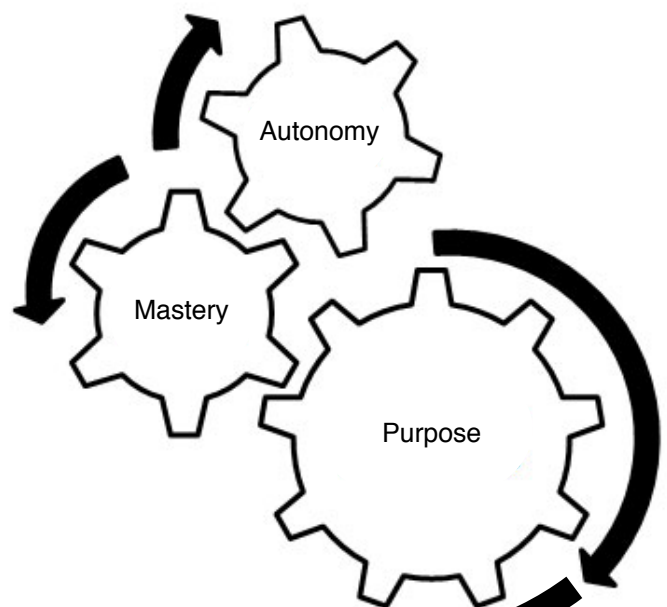
So what environment do we learn most in? **Science confirms high performance is linked to intrinsic motivation - so we work harder on things which matter to us ...**

Sometimes you might need to be shown what you don't yet know or the skill yet to be owned is the asset (supporting the associative phase of learning). When a conscious decision is made on what someone wants to know the fuel of motivation is ignited to take the journey the longest distance. Our minds are set free to explore the broadest spectrum of new discoveries without fear of failing, and what's best is we have this pre-installed in our behaviour! Watch a child learning through free play. Or see a baby learning to walk - they are learning through free choice, with no incentive other than to walk aptly on its own two feet, overcoming motor skill obstacles. We can do this as juniors or adults too.

Embracing this methodology has come up against some challenges, it's just not how we have grown up in teaching environments. It's different to what social science has accepted and what factual based science tells us. However, some highly successful companies have adopted a new approach called Autonomy or Mastery Purpose.

Autonomy over the task and to choose where someone places their attention. We are already pre-programmed to problem solve and tend to choose "things" we can't yet do or understand fully. We have a pre-disposition to **master** what matters to give **purpose** to do something bigger than ourselves.

This has proven so successful for Google that 20% of their workforce choose their own working subject. The astonishing statistic for me is that 50% of all Google's products are born from that 20% devotion to their time....wow!



GETS STUFF DONE.

Science has confirmed for us there is a better way to further our knowledge than to offer tangible rewards for cognitive tasks. Trophies and medals are nice but they will can't motivate you to your potential, they become a distraction if the process requires thought or learning. Yes, see them as achievements and celebrate their appearance they are a classic symbol of winning. Tournaments wouldn't be the same without them! For coaches and teachers they are not the incentives required to take somebodies abilities to the next level and to **develop cognitive tasks**. We mustn't ignore the children whose achievements are well below the tangible radar but who may be the ones most intrinsically motivated and therefore are achievers and will continue to be in life.

What I have learnt through some of my own challenging times is that there is a clear definition between these two things - Motivation and Commitment. Here is the way I see it.

Motivation comes from sources either intrinsic or extrinsic. Fair dos, sometimes we just aren't motivated to go to the gym or chase down that drop shot so we will never know if it was within our reach. However, commitment doesn't allow the lack of motivation to get in the way of chasing a drop shot or skipping the team practice because you are tired.

Commitment doesn't really mind whether motivation is present or not. Commitment stokes the mind and body into progressing in a chosen sport, subject, instrument or whatever it is you desire to perform or understand well.

I see it now with some of the players I'm working with. There are times when motivation and energy are running low, especially around the 11+, but their commitment to the sport, team and personal development never stopped them putting in another shift on court.

Commitment, you believe in something which dangles the solution in front of you. The passion for finding the **solution** therefore trumps all and is perhaps the source of the unmeasurable energy of motivation



Why do you do, what you do?

Lee Friend