

Intrinsic Motivation – 1.1 What gets you out of bed in the morning?

I want you all to take a deep breath with me, close your eyes, and try to imagine yourself in the situation I am about to describe...

It's dark. You're lying in bed. You're slightly conscious. You hear rustling. It's your pet moving toward the bed. They know it's almost time to get up. Time for breakfast. The alarm sounds. It's Monday morning. A new day. A work day. A work remote day, again. What are you feeling? What are you thinking?

Sit in reflection for a moment. Ask yourself: what is getting me out of bed? The thought of a hot cup of coffee? The desire to workout before getting down to business. Knowing you've got to get your child logged in for e-learning? Wanting to be awake to savor the silence before anyone else wakes up?

Maybe you're lying there thinking about your to do list at work that just keeps growing... Then you remember that sticky situation you emailed your boss about at the end of last week... You wonder if there's a response waiting in your inbox...

Alright, you can all open your eyes. How quickly our thoughts turn to all that we have to do!

Naturally, our thoughts stay pretty surface-level most of the time. We're busy. There's always something that needs to get done. But taking the time to tune into our motivation, the "why" behind our daily routines and rituals, can increase our fortitude and help us to keep striving through tough times like living through an 9-plus month long pandemic.

The holiday season is a natural time to reflect. Over the past year, there has been love and loss. Joys and sorrows. Gratitude and hardships. Monotony and crisis. Ebb and flow. How do you stay centered and grounded through it all?

Connecting with what motivates you may help you make decisions about how to spend your limited time, talent, and treasure. It might help you see what expectations you have for yourself that need to be let go. Or re-prioritized. Examining motivation brings direction. And once we know the direction, it's easier to make progress, which we all know is satisfying! Like watching the blanket you're knitting grow larger and longer; outdoing your previous personal best on a 5K; finally nailing that once-a-year family recipe for chocolate babka; harvesting the largest bounty yet from your vegetable garden at home.

Thus, begins our Notre Dame Research Winter Series exploration into motivation. You might be wondering why my employer is offering a series on motivation? Well, humans aren't like robots with two different modes, "work mode," and "home mode." We're integrated, messy, fully-human people who work, play, live, love, and more. Notre Dame Research strives to be a Great Place to Work and that means it has to be great for full, multi-dimensional humans, not "work mode robots." This series will definitely be framed within the context of work, but the ideas we explore will be applicable outside the office or lab.

The real substance of this series comes from a book that NDR has been discussing with managers across the division for the last year. It's called Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us by Daniel Pink. In this book, Pink argues that there is a mismatch between how most businesses operate (think: bonuses for a job well done) and what science from the last several decades has revealed about motivation at work.

Here's what you can expect the outcomes of following along with this series to be:

1. You will learn a common language for talking about motivation and fulfillment in the workplace that you share with your coworkers and manager.
2. You will receive questions to reflect on your own life and what drives you and may experience a reduction in stress.
3. You will connect with your purpose and may experience increased resiliency as you navigate your way forward through the continued challenges of the pandemic.

So, let's do a little work. The first thing you need to know about Pink's motivation paradigm is the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation is the drive to pursue external rewards or to escape punishment. The metaphor that is commonly used to describe extrinsic motivation is "carrots and sticks." That is, an animal like a donkey can be motivated to move faster by either being hit with a stick or strung along following a carrot at the end of a fishing pole. In the workplace, "carrots" might look like pay for performance models, bonuses, promotions, awards, public praise, and more. "Punishments" might take the form of less desirable hours, public criticism, or a verbal lashing like yelling or negative, unconstructive feedback, or being fired. This is the model that Pink says most businesses operate on.

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is the drive to do things for their own sake or the drive to do things because they matter to you. Intrinsic motivation comes from within each person and following it produces satisfaction. In the workplace this might look like getting to work on a new and exciting project that has you problem-solving while you're getting ready for work. Or pitching in to help staff a COVID-19 testing site because you recognize that having students study on campus is greater and more compelling than your discomfort of doing something outside of your usual job.

You might be thinking, "OK, why does the kind of motivation matter here?"

Well, in the workplace, research has shown that intrinsically motivated employees are more satisfied. And couldn't we all use a little more workplace satisfaction? And satisfaction and fulfillment give you the mental space you need to be more creative, live more authentically, and perform at your best. This is true at work or at home.

On the flip side, there's also a lot of data out there that shows that extrinsic rewards only "work" at improving performance and increasing motivation if the activity to be done has a clear set of rules and a single solution. Does this sound like your job?? Most of us work at things that require evaluation, assessment, discernment, and sometimes "winging it" based on the best knowledge we can gather at the time.

At this point you might be thinking, great! This series is just another thing to add to my to do list. Or Look, I'm just doing my job... I don't find research administration or paper pushing to be fulfilling. I'm going to tune this out or go through the motions to make my boss happy.

What if I told you that it's not a black/white/done deal sort of thing. You can INCREASE your intrinsic motivation and your satisfaction—at least in the workplace—by adding three things according to Daniel Pink.

Autonomy. Mastery. And Purpose. These are the building blocks of intrinsic motivation.

Let me give you Pink's definitions:

- Autonomy – the urge to direct our own lives
- Mastery – the desire to get better and better at something that matters
- Purpose – the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves

Notre Dame Research thinks it's worth spending time exploring motivation in hopes that all of us might become better, stronger, more authentic, more fulfilled versions of ourselves.

Thanks for watching! Stay tuned for our next installment: How can I increase my motivation?