

Video Transcript

Winter Session Intrinsic Motivation Series

1.2 December 9 - How can I increase my intrinsic motivation?

This week's installment of the Notre Dame Research – Winter Session Intrinsic Motivation Series begins with an important reminder. (Not like anyone's forgotten, but...) we are living through a pandemic. For everyone watching this video, it is essential that you check in with yourself and assess your mental and emotional health. Please make use of the resources available to Notre Dame employees including the Wellness Center, LifeWorks Employee Assistance Program, Health Advocate, and more. There is an extensive list of resources on the here.nd.edu website, plus a customizable search tool, so you can target specific topics and tools that interest you and are available to employees. Remember pretending everything is OK right now could make you feel worse. Stress and anxiety are known motivation killers, so it's important to keep our unique circumstances in mind as we discuss this week's topic: How can I increase my motivation?

First, let's recap what we've learned so far. Daniel Pink in his book *Drive* offers what he calls a new model for motivation in the workplace. Rather than extrinsic rewards like pay for performance models or perks, Pink says the way to increase creativity, satisfaction, productivity, and fulfillment in the workplace is to foster intrinsic motivation. He says there are three essential requirements for increasing intrinsic motivation: Autonomy, Mastery, & Purpose. According to Pink, autonomy creates engagement, which leads to mastery, and he says humans are naturally inclined to seek purpose.

What's important to realize about Pink's argument in *Drive* is that his primary audience is managers and leadership--he is talking to the people in charge about how to create work environments that promote intrinsic motivation instead of focusing on one-upping each other's extrinsic motivators, like offering Silicon-Valley-sized salaries, installing on-tap kombucha stations, or redecorating the home office with playground equipment.

However, infusing autonomy, mastery, and purpose into your life—in the workplace or at home—is something that all of us can try, whether or not we oversee others' work as part of our responsibilities.

That said, in the workplace, adding these elements will require conversations and a back-and-forth between you and your manager. (Spoiler alert: Relationships, other analysts argue, are also an essential element of intrinsic motivation, but we'll talk more about that later.)

One of the reasons NDR wanted to offer this series is to give everyone in the division a common language for talking about motivation. And also to empower staff to initiate discussions with their managers about what they feel is important to achieving satisfaction at work. Maybe it's the opportunity to learn something new (mastery). Maybe it's a role on a cross-functional/cross-unit team or task force to meet new people (relationships). Maybe it's the opportunity to have some time in the workday dedicated to just learning or improving a specific skill (mastery & autonomy). Maybe more direction is needed from your manager when you're not sure which way to go (mastery). Or maybe you need your manager to step back sometimes and say, "I trust you to make this decision." (autonomy)

Let's take a quick look at each element individually.

First up: Autonomy -- the urge to direct our own lives. For Pink this means having control over your time and who you collaborate with at work. If you experienced working remotely as part of

the pandemic shutdowns, you likely have a whole new understanding of what autonomy means. If you are still working remotely, ask yourself: Am I sitting comfortably in this autonomous space? Or am I missing the structure of the office? Do you remain so constricted by the 8 to 5 hour work window that you are neglecting your self-care? Are you taking restorative breaks that include more than just doing chores?

If you are enjoying remote work, what is something from this time that you could bring back when you return to the office? Maybe it's a lunchtime walk? Coffee breaks with coworkers without an agenda? Perhaps you thrive focusing on outputs and accomplishments and not time in the seat. On the flipside, what did you enjoy before the pandemic that you can bring to the Spring semester of remote work (for example, scheduling lunches with colleagues, walking the lakes, taking in an afternoon lecture via Zoom?) We are in a special position to analyze our circumstances backward and forward in the pandemic and see what lessons they can offer us. Intentionally examining and planning your schedule to include things that are important to you will support your autonomy and feed your intrinsic motivation.

Next, we have Mastery – the desire to get better and better at something that matters. Pink notes the importance of regular feedback to increasing mastery, which is definitely something Notre Dame has promoted in its shift to coaching culture. This is small “f” feedback we’re talking about and not year-end performance capital “F” Feedback. Consider: Maybe you would prefer two shorter check-ins with your manager instead of a single session once a week? Another aspect of mastery is the experience of “flow” as described by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow is a state in which people are so focused on an activity that time seems to melt away. Pink argues that achieving flow requires a “Goldilocks task” that perfectly balances challenge and ability (ideally a notch or two beyond someone's current skill level). We’ll talk about flow in a later installment of this series but worth noting is that finding “Goldilocks” tasks requires speaking up! Your boss won’t necessarily know what tasks are right for you and suffering alone in an anxious state could kill your motivation.

Speaking up can also mean sharing your insights, however small. You don’t have to be an expert to have a comment or tidbit of information that might help a colleague. Share as generously as you can to help propel your team forward. Your moment getting outside your comfort zone might mean the world to your colleague.

If you feel stalled on a project or stuck, Dr. Alice Boyes, a former clinical psychologist turned writer, offers some fantastic strategies for revving up your motivation.

First, try a fairly easy or familiar task. Relying on “muscle memory” is easier than tackling something unfamiliar and achieves what many call “small wins.” If you need more motivation, next try a more challenging task, especially one that you struggle to get done... during your time-off. Yes, pick something not on your work to do list and get it done. What follows may just be the sense of accomplishment and competency that mastery provides and that can kickstart your motivation!

And then there is purpose – the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves. Your purpose—maybe it’s the thing that gets you up out of bed in the morning—is specific to you. And it might change depending on your season of life or what’s happening in your world right now. Sometimes little kids or aging parents or both make sure we know our purpose with every exhausted fiber of our being. Sometimes it’s more about what we are able to give back to our communities or friends. Or to the world through our work. Or to the community of people

we've met through our hobbies and special interests whether it's music, gaming, or religious affiliation. (pause)

To connect with why you work at Notre Dame, consider taking time to appreciate and relish what ND is trying to accomplish. Peruse headlines on news.nd.edu or scan the NDR twitter feed to see new research accomplishments. Look at the Congregation of Holy Cross website. Take a quiet walk around campus. Little reminders about why we are all working at Notre Dame can go a long way to boosting your sense of purpose.

OK, back to the spoiler, we're going to EXPAND Daniel Pink's paradigm to include a FOURTH essential element of intrinsic motivation--Relationships! Right now we're going to talk specifically about your relationships that are NOT your immediate family or close friends. I'm talking about those people in your outer circle: your neighborhood, your colleagues, parents at your kids' schools-type-of- people with whom you don't share an especially close relationship. This idea comes, again, from Dr. Alice Boyes. She recommends opening up to people in your "outer circle" sharing your struggles and vulnerabilities (Safely, mind you—masked and 6ft apart but also someone who you know to be sympathetic). This she explains will give you a boost of energy, motivation, and satisfaction. The freedom of being yourself is its own boost. And you'll likely get a boost by experiencing support and understanding from people who aren't your immediate family or best friends. Moreover, your authenticity will help other people to share their struggles, so you'll be helping someone else, too, which is naturally fulfilling.

If you identify as an introvert and the idea of sharing your struggles with peers sounds dreadful, another strategy to increase your motivation at work is coming up with 3 ways your work has helped others. Even if you feel a lack of motivation or creativity right now, thinking about how you've helped others in the past can be energizing and help you connect with your purpose at work. This technique is suggested by writer, Liz Fosslien, co-author of the book, *No Hard Feelings*.

I hope you've heard at least one thing today that you want to try for yourself. Regardless, it's important to keep in mind that feelings of motivation will come and go. For example, it's normal to start a new job with a lot of enthusiasm and then experience a low period when the initial excitement wears off and the new challenges are apparent. So, remember: try not to judge yourself during times of low motivation.

In these cases, what might be the best solution for increasing your intrinsic motivation at work is leaving the work behind for a day and focusing on something outside of work that gives you the feelings of autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Maybe recreating a favorite family recipe. Calling an old friend and not watching the clock. Tinkering with your drone collection. Driving up to Lake Michigan and hiking the dunes. Going on an "awe" walk around your neighborhood, stopping to take in whatever little details jump out at you. Remember you're human, not a "work mode robot" and so take time to relax and figuratively "recharge your batteries."

Thanks for watching! Join us next week for our last pre-break installment: How can defining my purpose help me on a day-to-day basis?