

# Motivation 3.0.

What makes teachers successful in the classroom?

What makes students curious, happy learners?

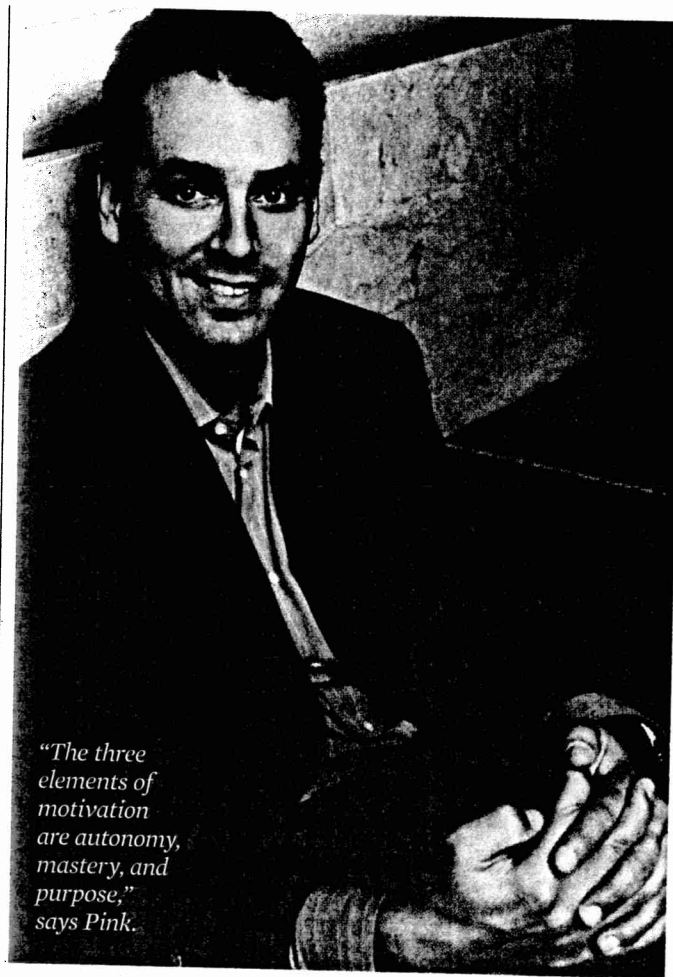
In his new book, *Drive*, best-selling author Daniel Pink argues there's a disconnect between what science tells us and what schools do.

It's time to fix it. BY DANA TRUBY

**F**IVE YEARS AGO, Daniel Pink's best-selling book, *A Whole New Mind*, was on every school leader's bedside table as we all struggled to conceptualize how to move toward a new model of education for the 21st century. In his new book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Pink focuses in on the science of human motivation. He argues that we've been conditioned to think the best way to motivate ourselves and others is through external reward—the “carrot and stick” approach. That's a big mistake, says Pink. The key to high performance and satisfaction—in the workplace and in our schools—is intrinsic, internal motivation: the desire to follow your interests, figure out your own solutions to problems, and understand the benefits. We caught up with Pink a couple of weeks before the release of *Drive* to ask how his conclusions impact the education world.

**Q Your new book takes a hard look at the science behind motivation.**

**A** In any sort of organization, we tend to think that the way to get people to perform is to punish the bad and reward the good. There's some logic to that, but, particularly as you ask people to do more



*“The three elements of motivation are autonomy, mastery, and purpose,” says Pink.*

complex, creative tasks, that sort of approach, that “carrot and stick” approach, simply doesn't work and actually causes all kinds of collateral damage.

**Q Don't we all value rewards?**

**A** What the science tells us is that contingent incen-

tives, what I call an “if-then” reward—if you do this, then you get that—do work for simple, rule-based tasks.

And routine tasks is the sort of work that defined most of the 20th century. On the manufacturing line, gaining compliance worked just fine. But that was then.

**Q But as we look toward the jobs of the future...?**

**A** Certainly fewer of us have jobs that involve solving very simple problems by following a set of steps and getting a right answer. The definitional tasks of 21st-century work are more complex, more creative. Solving complex problems requires an inquiring mind and the willingness to experiment one's way to a fresh solution. Where Motivation 2.0 sought compliance, Motivation 3.0 seeks engagement.

**Q How would you define Motivation 3.0?**

**A** Our basic nature is to be curious and self-directed. Have you ever seen a 1-year-old who's *not* curious and self-directed? Human beings want to learn, to make choices, to achieve. If we want higher-level work, the science shows us the better way to motivation is to build more on autonomy, our desire to be self-directed; on mastery, which is our desire to get better and better at something that matters; and on purpose, which is our desire to be part of something larger than ourselves.

**Q In the education world, the call is growing for greater autonomy and experimentation with the learning process in schools. At the same time, there is a push toward great-**

**er regimentation.**

A In my view, the push toward regimentation is far more prevalent. Yes, there are more and more innovative public and charter schools and a notable rise of homeschooling. But that said, the vast majority of kids are going to classrooms where high-stakes standardized testing sets the agenda.

**Q So most schools are still operating on Motivation 2.0?**

A Yes, and that's a problem. There's a disconnect between how we prepare kids for work and how work actually operates: In school, problems almost always are clearly defined, confined to a single discipline, and have one right answer. But in the workplace, they're practically the opposite. Problems are usually poorly defined, multidisciplinary, and have several possible answers, none of them perfect.

**Q At the same time, there are amazing examples of innovative, inquiry-based schools out there.**

A Absolutely, and I talk about some of them in *Drive*. The Big Picture Learning high school in Providence, Rhode Island, is a great example. The kids' interests dictate the curriculum. The students are assessed the way adults are—on work performance, individual presentation, effort, attitude, and behavior on the job. Big Picture kids—most of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds—end up completely outperforming their peers on standardized tests. They end up easily outperforming their peers in language arts because they're reading and writing about subjects that are relevant to them and that they're interested in.

**Q So it's all individualized learning for every child?**

A Here's an example: One

student I met had a strong interest in martial arts, so the school ended up building a curriculum around it. He works two days a week in a martial arts studio, so he's learning business skills. He uses martial arts in his physics and math projects. Not to mention this kid knows more about Japanese history than any non-academic Westerner I've ever met. I should say that a lot of work goes into helping students discover those "just-right" tasks, into helping them to find their paths. It's teaching of a different kind.

**Q Fascinating. What about younger children? How do we allow autonomy within reasonable expectations of and requirements for, say, a third grader?**

A Even for younger learners, the more that you break down the barriers between

school and the rest of the world, the better. Everybody, little kids included, wants to work on real-world problems that are relevant. A lot of schools are doing this.

**Q The mandate of public schools is to educate every child. Do you think an individualized program like Big Picture Learning is reproducible on a large scale?**

A I think that it's challenging, but not impossible. We are seeing a move now toward differentiated learning. The more we allow a kid's learning style to shape how the learning occurs, the more you're allowing that kid to be an autonomous learner.

**Q This vision of a 21st-century education would very much change how educators work at every level.**

A Definitely. Superintendents already have one of the hard-

est jobs there is. Perhaps it would make the jobs of teachers and of education leaders more complicated and yet more satisfying at the same time.

**Q If you could change three things about American public education tomorrow, what would they be?**

A Wow, that's a tough one. First, I would give teachers far greater autonomy, that is, unshackle them from standardized tests and allow them to teach *what* they want the way that they want. I think that would have a remarkable positive effect on 85 percent of the classrooms in this country.

The second thing would be—to the extent it's possible—to tear down the walls between disciplines, and between the school and the wider world. One of the strengths of primary school is that it doesn't segment math and science, and English and history.

But, by the time our kids get to about sixth grade, we frog-march them from one discipline to another and rarely point out the connections among those disciplines. The world itself is inherently multidisciplinary.

**Q You have one more magic educational wish left.**

A The third thing would be a FedEx day—I talk about that a lot in *Drive*. One school day set aside for student-chosen, student-led learning projects—much as FedEx does in its corporate office. In advance, help students collect the tools, information, and supplies they might need. Then, ask them to deliver—by reporting back to the class on their discoveries and experiences. I think so many neurons would be firing that kids might just end up producing things that would blow the socks off all the adults in the room.

**MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL TEAM**

*Motivation 3.0 means giving up control over the process and the outcome, says Pink.*

“Extending people the freedom they need to do great work is usually wise, but it's not always easy. So if you're feeling the urge to control, here are three ways to begin letting go—for your own benefit and your team's:

**Involve people in goal-setting.** Would you rather set your own goals or have them foisted upon you? Thought so. Why should those working with you be any different? A considerable body of research shows that individuals are far more engaged when pursuing goals they had a hand in creating. So bring employees into the process. They could surprise you: People often have higher aims than the ones you assign them.

**Use non-controlling language.** Next time you're about to say “must” or “should,” try saying “think about” or “consider” instead. A small change in wording can help promote engagement over compliance and might even reduce some people's urge to defy. Think about it.

**Hold office hours.** Sometimes you need to summon people into your office. But sometimes it's wise to let them come to you. Take a cue from college professors and set aside one or two hours a week when your schedule is clear and any employee can come in and talk to you about anything that's on her mind. Your colleague might benefit and you might learn something.” From *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink (Riverhead, 2009)

