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A Better Choice Than Carrots and Sticks

Review by Chris Lauer

DRIVE The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

by Daniel H. Pink

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Human beings have been studying how people can be motivated to do better work since the dawn of the industrial age. But for the latest results of the most important experiments in motivation — and the ways they can be applied in the modern workplace — author Daniel Pink delivers an impressive collection of evidence in his latest book, *Drive*.

According to the latest science, we've moved a long way from treating people like beasts of burden, who were once driven with the promise of a carrot or the threat of a stick.

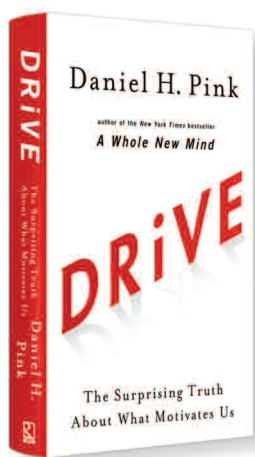
In an earlier life, Pink worked in the White House as the chief speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore. In that role, Pink became adept at turning a phrase and making profound insights understandable. In the speeches he wrote and in all the books he has written since, his skills at relating stories to an audience are apparent. Ultimately, the stories he tells lead readers in smarter directions.

The Need for New Rules

In his first two books, *A Whole New Mind* (2001) and the *Free Agent Nation* (2005), Pink asserted how our thinking must change if we want to adapt to the work needs of the 21st century. While examining the latest

science and business case studies, he was able to show how people have moved out of a time when industrial-era business practices were useful and into a better place even beyond the time of the corporate information worker.

A new set of rules is needed, and the success of Pink's books shows that he has a gift for envisioning what those rules should be. He is on to something, and employee-manager relationships will never be the same.



In 2008, Pink even wrote a business book that combined his principles for a better work life with the Japanese *manga* format to create a business book/comic book hybrid titled *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko*. In that unique, informative and entertaining book, he offered his trademark career advice in a groundbreaking new style.

The following year, Pink returned to his love of scientific research and its application in the working world with *Drive*.

Tackling the elusive topic of workplace motivation is no easy task, but with piles of academic and business studies to back up his ideas, Pink has created a fascinating tool kit that any employer, manager or business leader can use to evolve out of the 20th-century thinking that actually hinders workplace motivation.

Monkey Puzzles Promote Revelation

The research that lays the foundation for the concepts and advice Pink delivers in *Drive* started back in the 1940s when a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin named Harry F. Harlow was studying the behavior of eight rhesus monkeys in his laboratory.

Although he set out to understand more about the ways in which they learn, he discovered a few important keys to human motivation along the way.

First, Harlow put a simple mechanical puzzle into each of the monkeys' cages to see how they reacted. The puzzle required the monkey to perform a series of simple steps to open a latch.

The interesting thing that he discovered from his experiment was that the monkeys quickly learned to solve the puzzle without the slightest bit of reward. It seemed they just liked to solve puzzles. They were not preprogrammed by instinct to pull the pin so they could unhook the hook and open the latch, so there was no biological motivation to solve the puzzle. They also didn't seem to need the classic "extrinsic" motivations, such as food, water, sexual gratification or the threat of punishment to do the task.

Instead of being compelled by either biological or extrinsic motivations, it seemed to Harlow that the monkeys were compelled by a *third* drive: an "intrinsic" motivation that provided its own rewards. In other words, these creatures actually enjoyed completing the task. Solving the puzzle was enjoyable enough to provide its own reward.

Harlow wondered what would happen if he were to add some extrinsic rewards to the equation. Surely the monkeys would perform the task even faster and better. But the scientist discovered something even more interesting: The monkeys made more errors and solved the puzzles slower when they were offered food as a reward for solving them.

In other words, extrinsic rewards actually disrupted their performance. This was a new discovery indeed. Harlow hypothesized that this third drive — intrinsic motivation that comes from the sheer joy of completing a task — can be "as efficient in facilitating learning" as the other two drives, if not more.

Edward Deci's Discovery

Although most people at the time believed that carrots and sticks and other types of external rewards and punishments were the best ways to drive human behavior, Harlow's work indicated that they were all wrong! This was a radical theory back in the 1940s. In fact, it was so radical that Harlow moved his subsequent research in a completely different direction. Throughout *Drive*, Pink explores studies from a variety of other people whose work helps to support Harlow's theory.

Most scientists did not catch on to the deeper implica-

tions of Harlow's monkey study right away, but another researcher eventually picked up the torch and ran with it in 1969. That researcher was Edward Deci, a Carnegie Mellon University psychology graduate student.

Deci wanted to find out how pay influences the way people work over time, so he gathered some men and women for a study. Test participants were divided into two groups. Those in one group were never paid to solve a challenging puzzle. The other group went unpaid on the first day, was paid on the second day and was not paid on the third day. After the three-day experiment, Deci made an important discovery. He found that the people who were never paid to work on the puzzle actually worked on the puzzle longer each day than they did on the preceding day. But those who had been paid on the second day but went unpaid the third day actually worked less on the puzzle than they had during the time when they were being paid.

Deci concluded, "When money is used as an external reward for some activity, the subjects lose intrinsic interest for the activity." He found that rewards can create a boost in activity, but that boost eventually wears off and can actually reduce motivation over time.

When Do Carrots Work?

Many more scientific experiments have been performed since both Harlow's and Deci's original studies of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. In *Drive*, Pink expands on their findings while proffering the idea that the carrot-and-stick approach that has been favored by managers for decades can have negative effects on the motivation it was intended to create. But, in the name of fair and balanced reporting, Pink also offers a few circumstances when that approach actually does work.

When do carrots work? Studies show that for simple, short-term tasks such as stuffing envelopes, paying people well to do it is actually a great way to get them to complete the task. Pink explains that acknowledging that the task is dull, explaining the importance of the boring task and giving people a sense of autonomy over its completion can be useful motivators in this situation.

'Type I' Behavior

After Pink firmly makes the point that carrots and sticks are usually the wrong way to go when trying to motivate people to do more compelling work, he proposes a new way to think about motivation. This new perspective on motivation is based around something Pink calls "Type I" behavior. (The "I" stands for

... Rewards can create a boost in activity, but that boost eventually wears off and can actually reduce motivation.

“intrinsic.”) This type of behavior is a counterbalance to the “Type X” behavior (“X” stands for “extrinsic”) that has been the ruling theory on motivation in the workplace for many, many years. Connecting this approach to business and working life with a multitude of examples from the world of behavioral science and psychology, Pink describes how a better understanding of our “third” drive can help us better direct our own lives, create new things, learn more and improve our work and lives. Pink writes that Type I behavior “concerns itself less with the external rewards to which an activity leads and more with the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself.”

One of the benefits of Pink’s ideas about moving people from Type X behaviors toward Type I behaviors is the important concept of work satisfaction. The formula for creating this satisfaction, which Pink describes throughout *Drive*, is made up of three vital elements: autonomy, which is our desire to be self-directed; mastery, which is our drive to improve what we do; and purpose, which involves our desire to be part of something that is larger than ourselves.

The Importance of Autonomy

The first of these three important ways to tap into the power of intrinsic motivation is *autonomy*, which provides a sense of personal choice that helps people feel good about the work they are doing. When we feel autonomous, we feel better about ourselves and our lives. A sense of autonomy, Pink explains, also has a powerful effect on our performance and our attitude. This theory is supported by a variety of behavioral science studies, including those by Deci, Harlow, researcher Richard Ryan and positive psychology innovator Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.

In *Drive*, Pink describes how this new perspective on motivation is beginning to spread among many brilliant scientists and open-minded business executives. One of those executives is Jeff Gunther, the CEO of a computer software and hardware company called Meddius. Gunther is one of a new breed of forward-thinking business leaders who believe in the power of autonomy. That’s why he allows the people who work for him in Charlottesville, VA, to do their work on their own terms. Pink explains how Gunther successfully applies the work of Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, two former human resources executives from Best Buy, to his people at Meddius. Ressler and Thompson are the innovators behind “results-only work environments,” or ROWEs.

The key to making autonomy work comes from what Pink calls “the four T’s”: task, time, technique and team.

Meddius is built around the ROWE principle that says employees don’t need schedules, they just need to complete their work. How and when they perform their work is up to them. Once the people at Meddius figured out the benefits of a ROWE, Gunther discovered that productivity increased, stress decreased and people were generally happier. After experimenting with ROWE during a trial period, Gunther found the program so successful that he moved his company to ROWE permanently.

Pink explains that managers who tap into the power of autonomy not only enhance performance levels at work, but they also increase employee job satisfaction. He also points out that one study at Cornell University found that companies that offered autonomy to their employees “grew at four times the rate of the control-oriented firms and had one-third the turnover.”

The key to making autonomy work comes from what Pink calls “the four T’s”: *task, time, technique* and *team*. He explains that people work better when they have more control over their tasks. They can make choices about when they perform those tasks. They can also choose how those tasks get done as well as self-assemble the groups of people needed to perform more complex tasks.

Defining and Understanding Mastery

The second part in the trilogy of elements that lead to more motivation is the concept of *mastery*. When people are pursuing mastery, they are fully engaged and working hard to become better at something that matters to them.

Pink writes that “flow” is an essential part of mastery. When we are in our personal flow, time disappears and we really enjoy our work. While in flow, we are challenged, but not so much that we become frustrated. The task is also not so easy that we become bored. We are in flow when we are doing something that is perfectly matched to our abilities, yet we are also learning along the way.

While most employers and managers might not be able to facilitate flow every day for every employee, Pink writes that it is important to try to create as many opportunities as possible for an employee to work within his or her flow during the workday so he or she will remain more engaged and satisfied.

Pink writes that there are three principles that should be considered when applying mastery to a work situation. First, mastery requires a person to see his or her

abilities as improvable. It is a mindset. Second, mastery requires a little discomfort. Deliberate practice is not easy, so pursuing mastery will always require vast effort. And the third rule of mastery is that it is actually impossible to fully achieve. It is this illusive nature of mastery that keeps it somewhat frustrating yet captivating. That's the mystery that makes it so appealing.

Connect With a Sense of Purpose

The final element in Pink's three-part motivation equation is *purpose*. We all need to find deeper meaning in our work.

The autonomy we create and the mastery we pursue must also connect to something bigger than ourselves to be truly satisfying. Whether this means creating a more meaningful legacy for those who will follow us on the planet or having a greater impact on the people around us today, Pink points out that research shows that a cause that is greater than ourselves can be one of the most powerful motivators of all. When leaders and organizations find meaningful ways to add purpose to the work of their people, they improve that work and create better organizations.

For example, one study of physicians at prestigious workplaces such as the Mayo Clinic shows that people in high-pressure jobs can cope with that pressure better when they are given a chance to do things in their jobs that are more meaningful to them. When a trial policy was put in place that allowed doctors to spend one day each workweek doing the work that had the most purpose to them, such as patient care, research or community service, they suffered half the burnout rate of other doctors who did not get to engage in those activities.

Pink shows that many studies and the policies that take them into account prove how effective the “pur-

pose motive” can be when it is applied in many types of settings. Those studies demonstrate that short-term goals cannot motivate people over the long haul like the power of looking at the big picture and putting love and attention into the things that truly matter to us.

A Better Way

When all three of these elements are combined in the workplace, the research found in *Drive* shows that people are more motivated to do their work because they are enjoying more satisfying work and careers along the way.

All the studies profiled in *Drive* point business leaders and organizations in a new direction; they can improve their performance by shifting their management tactics and techniques to better reflect the latest discoveries made by forward-looking researchers and the experiences of executives who have taken their work seriously. Moving in this new direction means moving away from old habits and outdated ideas that once dominated the business landscape.

The point is that the carrots and sticks of yesteryear could actually hinder high performance.

The new world of work that Pink describes in *Drive* is built on leaders finding innovative and creative ways to tap into deep-seated desires: the need to be autonomous in our work, to get better at what we like to do and to find greater purpose in life.

When the leaders of today and tomorrow get better at offering all three of these things, they will begin to reap the benefits of the science and real-world experiences that Pink has compiled in his latest and most thought-provoking book yet. We are not donkeys. The time of carrots and sticks has come to an end. ●

The carrots and sticks of yesteryear could actually hinder high performance. The new world of work that Pink describes in *Drive* is built on leaders finding innovative and creative ways to tap into deep-seated desires.

The author: Daniel H. Pink is the author of *A Whole New Mind*, a long-running *New York Times* and *BusinessWeek* bestseller that has been translated into 20 languages. Besides writing two other best-selling books, *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko* and *Free Agent Nation*, Pink has contributed to *The New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Fast Company* and *Wired*.



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