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PART I

Get Motivated

The idea of motivation is not new. Since the dawn of time, no, even before that; way back at the crack of midnight the night before time dawned, we've sought ways to increase our motivation. How do we inspire groups of people to take action? What strategies can we use to encourage individuals to work harder, better, and faster? What can we rely upon to push and advance *ourselves* to strive? These questions and more have often sat at the heart of the matter for organizational leaders in the business world, in education, and in social assemblies.

But good heavens, where do we start? I searched for "motivation" online and returned over 30 million hits in a fraction of a second. That is a lot of articles, theories, ideas, theses, videos, speeches, strategies, suggestions, and approaches! In times like these, I turn to a couple of trusted resources: Marcus Buckingham and Daniel Pink.

Mr. Buckingham, a former researcher with the Gallup Organization, is the author of several leadership texts from the private sector. He has also authored books that I have used in my schools and seminars to lead in-depth discussions about strengths, management styles, and increased efficiency in organizations. In fact, I've read, reread, quoted, and paraphrased Mr. Buckingham's work so often I sometimes feel he's in the room helping guide the discussions. In his influential work, *The One Thing You Need to Know . . . About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success*, Mr. Buckingham implores those of us in leadership roles to tackle the strategy that fits our needs:

To excel as a manager you must never forget that each of your direct reports is unique and that your chief responsibility is not to eradicate this uniqueness, but rather to arrange roles, responsibilities, and expectations so that you can capitalize upon it.

To excel as a leader requires the opposite skill. You must become adept at calling upon those needs we all share. Our common needs include the need for security, for community, for authority, and for respect, but for you, the leader, the most powerful universal need is our need for clarity.

And last, you must remember that your sustained success depends on your ability to cut out of your working life those activities, or people, that pull you off your strengths' path. . . . It will always be your responsibility to make the small but significant course corrections that allow you to sustain your highest and best contribution to the team, and to the better future it is charged with creating. (p. 284)

Mr. Pink, meanwhile, speaks exclusively of motivation in his 2009 book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*. In an argument describing a new era of workers and working environments, Mr. Pink posits that carrots and sticks are no longer the answer for mobilizing people toward greater productivity and a healthier output. The times of rewards and punishments have come and gone. Doing this actually makes them lose motivation in the long run. Rather, he claims, it's our responsibility to tap into people's intrinsic motivation. He categorizes as Type I behavior an extensive concern with the inherent satisfaction of the activity rather than of the rewards the activity brought. He described it thus:

Ultimately, Type I behavior depends on three nutrients: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Type I behavior is self-directed. It is devoted to becoming better and better at something that matters. And it connects that quest for excellence to a larger purpose.

Some might dismiss notions like these as gooey and idealistic, but the science says otherwise. The science confirms that this sort of behavior is essential to being

human—and that now, in a rapidly changing economy, it is also critical for professional, personal, and organizational success of any kind. (pp. 80–81)

Both offer insights into the world of motivation, and both contributions give us a glimpse into why motivation is such a complicated, beguiling, and tantalizing proposition: It's rarely the same for any two groups, teams, organizations, or people. It changes over time, alters with the circumstances, and moves like the wind.

The key, then, is to be on top of our games. If we're truly going to inspire, to encourage, to coax, to initiate, to stimulate, to light, to move, and to empower others (and *ourselves*), we must prepare a game plan. The first section of this book, which includes ten essays on the art of motivation of one sort or another, is an attempt to provide you some foundational tools. Whether you're launching an initiative, beginning a school year, gathering a committee, or just looking for a little pick-me-up (or "a kick in the arse," as my friend Mickey would say), Part I has got you covered.

Some of the essays, such as my bedrock "Always Strive to Be a Better You" and "Hope Ain't a Strategy," have decidedly philosophical bents. Others, including "The True Beauty of Goals," get a little more practical. Each is intended to make us, the readers, think more deeply about the activities we engage in as leaders, workers, and individuals; more importantly, we reflect upon *how* we pursue those activities. Some will resonate with you more than others. You might find a golden ticket among the wrappers, a little piece of encouragement for those down days that you'll flag and share with colleagues when the going gets rough. By no means have I provided to anyone The Answer; instead, all that I expect is that I've offered some motivation for you to ask and attack The Question with a bit more ferocity and vigor. Let's get motivated.

Always Strive to Be a Better You

In the 1950s and 1960s, novelist Ian Fleming created a character for a series of books, a secret agent whose triple-digit identity is as well known today as any string of numbers worldwide. He

also gave his spy a mantra: “Live and let die.” For 007, James Bond, whose professional and private lives intertwined quite intimately, that four-word phrase gave definition and direction to his very existence.

I believe in the power of a motto. When it’s utilized deeper than just as a tagline, a motto can offer a very clear, literally spelled-out reminder of what drives us as individuals. It can be a printed inner voice, conjuring images of the ideal. Like an alarm clock or the howling horn of the 6:00 eastbound express, a mantra contains the power to jolt us headlong toward our goals.

Many years ago, I adopted this credo: “Always strive to be a better you.” Its origins sprout from the ancient Greek philosophy of *paideia*, which espouses the belief that life’s true goal is to attain one’s ultimate potential. We should aim to become everything we could possibly be. The nifty twist is the idea that rides shotgun: The closer one approaches, the more one’s ultimate potential expands.

Thus, the result is a never ending quest for self-improvement, a persistent craving for advancement, and an unyielding mission to upgrade.

Think of it this way: Perhaps I have a goal to become a better disciplinarian. Even though the students are certainly not out of control, it’s true that our school has some behavior issues. To address the issue and my relationship to it, I enroll in a workshop titled “Discipline with Dignity.” Then, I take action: I attempt to discuss our school rules and behavioral expectations more frequently with the students. Over the course of several months, the overall conduct improves and discipline referrals decrease.

I could stop there, but I don’t. I make a concerted effort to spend more time on the grounds before and after school and in the cafeteria during the lunch hour. I walk the halls during passing times, thereby offering more supervision and presence. Now we have even fewer behavior problems, but I know I can help us improve further. I am still looking for a way to connect with our habitual discipline offenders, to interact with them in a positive manner as frequently as possible, to help guide them toward a positive path.

The point is that there's always something *more* I can do. I can always make it *better*. I can always strive to be a better *me*.

The "Always strive to be a better you" maxim, not unlike Commander Bond's, transcends boundaries between work and home, private and public, personal and professional. Ideally, it substantiates a philosophy that we can follow in every aspect of life. One way of viewing it is the pursuit of an ever-elusive quarry, the constant challenge to obtain the unattainable.

When I share this perspective with coworkers, friends, or politicians, I am often asked, "Does this make you feel like the hapless racing greyhound, endlessly chasing that silly fake rabbit?" On the contrary, it leaves me ecstatic with the *pursuit*. I understand and embrace that my quest may never be fulfilled, yet it is the hunt itself that becomes the goal.

Continuous Improvement

The end result is the continuous growth and improvement of *myself*, on all fronts. As I attempt to better myself as a father, brother, soccer coach, supervisor, lecturer, driver, or barbequer; or if I want to be more patient with hostile parents, more understanding with children dealing with trauma, prepare more thoroughly for committee meetings, eliminate sarcasm from my discourse with cantankerous colleagues, or develop ways to deliver more targeted feedback to teachers, my capacity for growth and improvement likewise gain.

This takes dedication, and dedication requires discipline. Discipline, in turn, requires reminders because it's pretty easy to slip back into the ruts of the path already traveled. This mantra is only as effective as it is A) meaningful to me, and B) always on my mind. The answer to charge A is contained herein—the definition and the challenges are explained right here on these pages.

I address part B by repeating, "Always strive to be a better you," or ASTBABY, whenever and wherever I can: The signature on the end of my e-mails allows me to share it with my entire contact list; I've coerced my schools to adopt the philosophy as part of their behavior pledges and discourse; I wear one of those silicone bracelets to provide me a physical and constant reminder of the life I want to lead; I even had the word "strive" tattooed on my shoulder as a permanent aide memoire. This