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Foreword

This is one of four occasional papers on the topic of motivation. The titles of the papers on this topic are:

Building strong motivation (Paper 4)

Can schools get beyond discipline? (Paper 5)

Positive thinking (Paper 6)

Self-esteem: not soft and not an option (Paper 7)

Building strong motivation sets the scene for the other three papers by looking generally at the issue of motivation – what it is and how it works. It examines some of the main ideas and beliefs underpinning the many theories about motivation, which have developed over the last hundred years. It focuses on what I have called 'strong' motivation and goes on to discuss if it is in fact the key life skill.

This paper is the fourth in a series of occasional papers. Each one draws on a wide body of research to summarise our current understanding about a key aspect of learning and teaching.

They are produced in the belief that it is critically important for teachers as professionals to reflect on the ideas and beliefs which underpin what they do in the classroom, and on the assumption that most teachers do not have the time or the energy to read lengthy academic texts at the end of a busy day in the classroom. They are short, and hopefully readable with further references given for those who want to explore further.

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Ian Smith, January 2001



The top ten rules of motivation

Given your beliefs and experience of motivating yourself and helping other people to motivate themselves, how many of the following ring true to you?

1. Strong motivation comes from inside – it is about who you are, not just about what you want and it is closely related to the way you feel about yourself.
2. You can change the way you feel about yourself by changing the way you think and the way you act.
3. Ultimately you cannot motivate anyone else, but you can play a key role in helping other people to motivate themselves.
4. You can change the way you feel about yourself by changing the way you think and the way you act.
5. There is no one magic potion that will motivate everyone: we are each motivated in different ways.
6. Motivation, once established, doesn't last forever: you have to work at it on an ongoing basis.
7. If what you are doing at the moment (to motivate yourself or to motivate others) is not working, try something different.
8. Motivation is contagious: you must be motivated to motivate.
9. Motivation requires setting goals either by yourself or with others.
10. Competition and challenge will only motivate you if you are able to succeed: progress and success motivate – you get interested in what you are good at.
11. Team-working motivates; trust motivates; involvement motivates – where there is no involvement, there is no commitment.

'Strictly speaking the answer to the question "How do you motivate other people?" is "You can't!". The desire to do something, much less the desire to do it well, cannot be imposed. All we can do is maximise the chances of people developing an interest in what they are doing and remove the conditions that act as constraints on them.'

Douglas McGregor