

3-Minute Motivators

More than 200 simple ways to reach, teach, and achieve more than you ever imagined

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Revised and Expanded Edition



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Preface to the Revised and Expanded Edition

“Respond; don’t react. Listen: don’t talk. Think: don’t assume.”

— Raji Lukkoor, *Inner Pilgrimage: Ten Days to a Mindful Me*

These words provided the foundations of this revised and enhanced version of *3-Minute Motivators*. Using this book, teachers will be responding to, listening to, and thinking about the daily needs of their students to be more in touch, in tune, in step, and in sync with them.

Consider this scenario: At some traffic intersections, loud, flashy barricades drop when trains are near, forcing drivers to stop and wait. When they rise, drivers resume on their way with minimum interruption and maximum safety. But if the barricades failed to fall and drivers failed to stop momentarily, it would lead to disaster! The barricade is a quick time-out. Analogously, 3-Minute Motivators provide these quick time-outs. Each creates a momentary, and often necessary, cessation of focus, without disturbing the overall flow of the classroom.

Daily, we want to encourage intrinsic motivation, manage anxiety, set high goals, and give honest feedback for our students. Sometimes a few moments of off-the-wall fun, energy refocus, or just plain distraction can work wonders in meeting these lofty goals. That’s always been the purpose of these quick-fire activities. But I’ve come to realize that they can do more.

It is obvious that today’s students are instantaneously and daily bombarded with sensual stimuli. So is it necessary that their communication be reduced to text messaging? Is it necessary for teachers to resort to only technological devices and media to touch their students? No, definitely not. We know that good teaching is, as always, mandatory for the social, emotional, and intellectual development of youth. And I believe there is a way to be a great teacher with—and perhaps in spite of—technology. That way includes using 3-Minute Motivators as a break from technology.

3-Minute Motivators can also be a tool for management of frustration or stress. In my experience as classroom teacher and instructor of classroom teachers, I have seen many times during the teaching week when the overall mood of the classroom is not as healthy as we would like. This can lead to teacher disillusionment, which in turn can lead to even more antagonistic classroom behaviors. It got me thinking: could a single refocuser make a quick and positive change to that negative situation?

So this new edition of *3-Minute Motivators* not only reworks the tried and true activities of the original book, but also adds new, tech-smart, exhilarating motivators, and explores activities related to mindfulness and wellness. I want it to help teachers by making teaching easier and students more involved, focused,

motivated, and self-aware. And I know that this can, in fact, be the case. The following was told to me by a young teacher at a teachers convention in Northern Alberta in 2013. I will not be able to impart the emotion she brought to the story, but I will do my best to repeat her words as accurately as possible:

3-Minute Motivators saved my life! I was teaching Junior High for the first time and nothing I did worked. Every lesson bombed. The kids never paid attention. All they wanted to do was talk and fool around or sleep. The Grade 7s were the worst. I dreaded facing them every day and was starting to hate my job. I was ready to quit when a friend gave me a copy of *3-Minute Motivators*. Within a few days—really—things had changed completely. Who knew Grade 7s would love the “Old Duke”? Or would be so involved with “Animal Farm”? Sure surprised me. But it worked. We worked! And we laughed together and learned together. I read every single page of that book—it was my go-to friend and it saved my career!

There is nothing in the world so contagious as laughter, smiles, and good humor, and, as this teacher discovered, many of the 3-Minute Motivators capitalize on those aspects of human behavior. In addition, they make use of positive thinking, movement, stillness, silliness, play, communication, cognition, exercise, and mindfulness.

As I began with a quote, let me end with a Swedish proverb:

Fear less, hope more; Eat less, chew more; Whine less, breathe more; Talk less, say more; Love more, and all good things will be yours.

I hope that this edition of *3-Minute Motivators* will guide all teachers and their students to hope, to breathe, to love, and to learn together.

Introduction

This is a book about magic! As every teacher knows, the best teaching always involves an element of magic—in the persona of the instructor, the presentation of curriculum, or the motivation of the students. Without a touch of magic, teaching can be mundane, students uninspired, lessons less powerful and more forgettable. Think about the following:

Before...

The students are restless. As Ms Black, the teacher, attempts to walk them through the steps for solving the problem, she notes that several are whispering, a couple are daydreaming, another is engaged in annoying the person in front, and most have that familiar vacant “no-one-home” stare. She realizes the brilliant spring sun shining through the window is definitely much more engaging than she is at the moment. She stops talking to see if they will refocus on their own; most don’t even seem to notice that she has ceased her presentation.

Teachers will recognize this scenario. It’s safe to say that most, if not all, have experienced similar situations and probably are, with increasing frequency, struggling with UUSS—Unmotivated/Unfocused Student Syndrome.

Why? What is making it so difficult for us to reach/teach our students? Is there some way to wake them up, to turn them on, to keep them involved and interested? Is there a secret method for competing with the highly technological worlds of these young people, who are bombarded with sensual stimuli on a daily basis?

Yes, I think there is! Consider this “after” image.

After...

Ms Black shakes her tambourine loudly. All eyes immediately turn to her and talking ceases. Her pre-established and reinforced cue has done its job well. Then she says quietly, “I can see I have lost most of you. Time for a refocuser! Let’s play a little game...” The words “play” and “game” invite students’ attention. They are familiar with refocusers and enjoy these brief interjections. “Turn to a neighbor,” Ms Black continues. “Let’s play Shake It!” (See page 69.) Immediately the students are completely engaged in the activity, laughing, talking, and attempting to “shake” the number called by the teacher. After about one minute, Ms Black interrupts the activity by once more shaking the tambourine. “Thanks for stopping on the cue,” she says sincerely. “Now that we’ve shaken out a bit of that excess energy, it’s time to return to the problem I was talking to you about...” The students, refocused, return to the task. This time all eyes are on the teacher.

The teacher in this scenario used a little magic to refocus her group; she provided an escape for excess vigor, then efficiently drew the students back into her lesson through a combined process of relaxing and energizing. It is entirely possible—and positive—to be relaxed and energized at the same time. When energy is directed it becomes “quality” energy, and has an innate calming component. As refocusers, 3-Minute Motivators help provide just that. They are simple activities that can be used with any grade, any subject, and any diversity found in the classroom. I have even experienced great success using them with university students and adults at conventions and workshops.

3-Minute Motivators is a collection of these concise activities that can be carried out *at* the desks, *beside* the desks, or *near* the desks, with minimum or no teacher preparation, making use of few props other than the occasional paper and pencil. The actions are designed to involve all the students in interesting, highly motivating ways for approximately three minutes, then to refocus them on the task at hand. Magic!

But why are such activities necessary? Shouldn't students have internal motivation to learn? Shouldn't they want to grow intellectually? Don't they appreciate the personal need for development as human beings? I believe the answer to each question is “yes”; but the many high-level, sense-bombarding, almost mind-numbing distractions in today's society can make classroom learning appear boring, inauthentic, and monotonous.

Consider the students' world. How can children be excited and motivated by what they often see as a dreary and lackluster curriculum, when they are inundated with MP3 players, smart phones, tablets, e-readers, and countless highly technological video games, just to name a few? How can they pay attention to a lesson when they are tempted daily by a wealth of stimulating information at their fingertips via the Internet? How can they sustain single-mindedness for seatwork when they are eager to get back to their camera/game/smart phone/home entertainment systems?

It takes a touch of magic to keep students inspired and focused today. *3-Minute Motivators* attempts to address this issue by offering a wealth of motivating activities ready for instant use in any classroom. In addition, most of these motivators can be readily adapted to be used as anticipatory sets for a wide variety of lessons. Once you have experimented with a few of them, I think you will agree that they are, indeed, magical. Use them with an open mind; have fun!