

# Motivation, Leadership and Human Nature

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*A reflective essay by André Christoffer Andersen (Winter 2011).*

I have come to the conclusion that there is no single situation where someone directly motivated me to perform above and beyond what I believed I was capable of. I have of course had spurts of motivation yielding results greater than usual. But, the motivation – it seems – emanated from within and was spurred on by the moment. To this day I have an inherent feeling that the solution to every challenge lies just beyond the next hill. My father – teacher and mentor – has throughout my life instilled a sense momentum and character. With unyielding love, encouragement and exposure to challenging environments I believe my father has shaped my character and sense of direction toward an ever expanding horizon. I believe this has played an important role in removing the feeling of ever being faced with an insurmountable problem or situation. I do still seek encouragement, motivation and advice, but the decisive factor already lives within.

Working as a private math and science tutor in Oslo I was hired by a concerned mother. Her daughter, studying in high school, was failing algebra and also wavering in her other courses. When we started our tutoring lessons I noticed she immediately despaired at only the hint of challenge. Walking through problems step by step I, however, discovered that there was nothing wrong with her ability to excel in school. She just lacked self-confidence and willingness to explore the problems she was facing. She was determined in believing she was inadequate. From the second session on I spent much less time on actual teaching the curriculum than I spent on encouragement and giving praise for effort. Explaining problems in metaphors and terms she understood paved the way to the more abstract problems. I tried to create a safe environment where she felt that being wrong was one step closer to being right. We eventually established a mathematical foundation she could build on herself. In discovering her grades that summer she enthusiastically e-mailed me, thanking me. I answered that she only had herself to thank. I think she ended up studying chemistry at University. My strategy came very naturally to me. Only in retrospect have I identified that I actually did anything more than teach. I am convinced that this method of motivating and creating an including and safe environment for learning was an inevitable result of how I have been continually motivated and encouraged throughout my life.

When it comes to my personal beliefs on motivation I readily subscribe to McGregor's "Theory X/Y" and Herzberg's "Two-Factor Model". McGregor explains how motivation springs from the

assumptions of our environment rather than the other way around. If we are encouraged and given responsibility we become motivated and responsible. We become what is expected of us. Also Herzberg motivating and hygiene factors are very enlightening and believable. He explains how some factors – hygiene factors – just remove discontentedness, but does nothing to motivate us. An example could be that our computer software works as it should. When it breaks down we are discontent, but not motivated by it being fixed. On the other hand motivational factors makes us go to work with a smile. For instance, we could look forward to enjoyable challenges and a sense of community at work. An important issue is that motivational factors are only effective when hygiene factors are satisfied.

When it comes to leadership I have a set of traits and properties that I find necessary. I believe that a leader should be goal oriented and have moral integrity. More precisely he or she should be fair, respectful, intelligent, organized, educated/knowledgeable, confident and including. Fairness, moral integrity and respectability are among the more important factors which lays the foundation of a great leader. Intelligence, education and knowledgeability are factors which underpin the value of being able to learn from the leader. Confidence and being including are traits that give the leader an aura of safety and acceptance. I want a leader to be a role model and counteract my own less fortunate traits and habits. Motivation comes partly from wanting to be accepted by the leader and his group and partly from wanting to be better – wanting to be as good as the leader.

Human nature and the nature-versus-nurture debate is a field of great discussion. The general consensus – which I subscribe to – is that we are both a product of nature and nurture. The main point of dispute is rather what fraction we are one over the other. Though, with basis in historical accounts it seems to me that we are borne with a moral *tabula rasa*. To some degree we have – by evolution – built in a sense of morality. Humans sometimes tend to be innately reciprocal and altruistic in contrast to the characters of game theory. But when reading about the great and horrible accounts of history I believe that nurture and the environment is an overriding factor which molds us to its predefined cultural morality. We are moral products of our peers. In this context morality and motivation seems to support McGregor's Theory X/Y.