

# Insights from *Drive* by Daniel Pink

## What is the best way to motivate yourself and others to do cognitively demanding work?

External rewards like cash bonuses are great for straight-forward tasks: getting kids to do their chores, convincing yourself to do repetitive data entry work, or motivating an employee to do assembly line work.

**However**, these ‘if you do this, I’ll reward you with that’ types of external incentives are horrible for motivating yourself and others to learn a difficult subject or come up with creative solutions to complex problems.

According to scientific research (studies: [1,2,3,4](#)), if you use external incentives like money, grades, or social status, you will do significant harm to one’s long-term motivation to do cognitively demanding work.

The best way to motivate yourself and others is to spark **three intrinsic drivers**:



### AUTONOMY

When Atlassian, an Australian software company, allowed their programmers to have a complete day of freedom (they were paid to work on whatever code they wanted with whomever they wanted), they came up with several new product ideas and dozens of creative solutions to existing problems.

Atlassian co-founder Mike Cannon-Brookes told author Daniel Pink, “If you don’t pay enough, you can lose people. But beyond that, money is not a motivator.” What motivates people beyond equal pay is work autonomy.

By giving yourself and others a degree of flexibility within a rigid framework with a choice of **tasks**, free **time** to work on side projects, choice of **technique**, and the opportunity to pick **team** members, you will spark the intrinsic drive of autonomy. Author Daniel Pink calls these **the four T’s of autonomy**: freedom to pick the task, the time, the technique, and the team.

**“Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement.” - Daniel Pink**



### MASTERY

When Swedish shipping company, Green Cargo, wanted to overhaul their performance review process, they implemented a key finding by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: when workers are given tasks slightly above their current skill level and stay in a state between boredom and anxiety, they are more engaged, more motivated to work, and more creative.

Green Cargo implemented Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s findings by changing the way they conducted performance reviews. During each performance review, managers now needed to determine if their employees were overwhelmed or underwhelmed with their current work assignments. Then the managers needed to work with each employee to craft Goldilocks work assignments: work assignments that weren’t too hard, not too easy, but just right above their current skill level.

What effect did Green Cargo’s new performance review system have? Employees were more engaged and reported feelings of mastery over their work. After two years of these new performance reviews, Green Cargo became profitable for the first time in 125 years.

**“One source of frustration in the workplace is the frequent mismatch between what people must do and what people can do. When what they must do exceeds their capabilities, the result is anxiety. When what they must do falls short of their capabilities, the result is boredom. But when the match is just right, the results can be glorious.” - Daniel Pink**



### PURPOSE

*“You have to repeat your mission and your purpose...over and over and over. And sometimes you’re like, doesn’t everyone already know this? It doesn’t matter. Starting out the meetings with This is Facebook’s mission, This is Instagram’s mission, and This is why Whatsapp exists (is critical).” - Sheryl Sandberg*

When Sheryl Sandberg starts her meetings by stating the mission, she’s sparking the third intrinsic driver: a sense of purpose.

Purpose is the reason organizations like ‘Doctors Without Borders’ can get highly skilled doctors to willingly travel to poor villages around the world, live in harsh conditions, and get paid very little money to do so. These doctors are motivated to work because they are fueled by a sense of purpose they get from helping others.

Ask: How will learning this topic allow you to help the people you care about? How will solving this problem serve the greater good?

**“Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives.” - Daniel Pink**