

# Why You Should Not Motivate People?

*Lessons for Leaders from Daniel Pink's "Drive"*

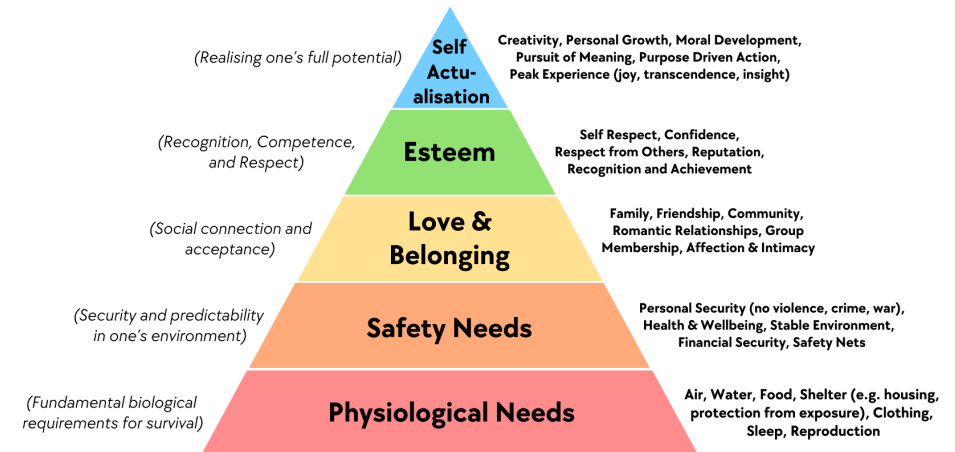
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# What comes to mind when you read this title?

- Motivation as "adding something"?
- Carrots & sticks?
- Pep talks?

# The old model - The "Carrot & Stick" approach

- Rewards (bonuses, perks)
- Punishments (pressure, micromanagement)
- Works for simple, mechanical tasks...  
👉 *But fails for creative, problem-solving work.*



# Think of a time you felt deeply motivated at work

- Was it because of a bonus?
- Or because of space, challenge, and meaning?

# The science - What really drives us?

- Autonomy 🧭 – Control over how we work
- Mastery 🎯 – Getting better at what matters
- Purpose 🌍 – Being part of something meaningful

# Autonomy

? Ask yourself:

- Do I let my team decide *how* to achieve outcomes?
- Do I trust them, or control every step?
- Do I measure presence, or results?

# Mastery

? Ask yourself:

- Do I give space for learning and growth?
- Do I encourage experiments, or punish mistakes?
- Do I celebrate progress, not just output?

# Purpose

? Ask yourself:

- Do people know why their work matters?
- Do I talk numbers... or impact?
- Do I connect tasks to customers and mission?

# Leaders' Role

**Not to "motivate," but to create conditions for motivation**

- Remove blockers
- Create space
- Connect to purpose

# Practical Shifts

## Ways to nurture motivation:

- Give teams choice in approach
- Build in learning opportunities
- Share real customer stories
- Recognize progress & impact

# Quick Exercise

- ☞ Pick one pillar (Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose).
  - What's one small change you could make next week?
  - Share with a partner or us.

# When rewards backfire

*What motivation science really shows*

# Deci's Soma Puzzle Experiment (1971)

## Goal / Assumption

Do external rewards enhance or harm people's natural interest in an activity?

## Setup

- Participants asked to solve Soma cube puzzles (a creative spatial task)
- One group was paid per puzzle, another solved freely without pay
- Later, both groups were left alone with puzzles — no payment offered

# Deci's Soma Puzzle Experiment (1971)

## Result

- Paid participants **lost interest** and spent less time playing voluntarily
- Unpaid participants kept solving out of curiosity and enjoyment

## Takeaway

Paying for inherently enjoyable work can **undermine intrinsic motivation** once the external incentive is gone

# Lepper, Greene & Nisbett (1973) – "Magic Marker" Study

## Goal / Assumption

What happens when children expect a reward for something they already like doing?

## Setup

- Preschoolers who loved drawing were split into groups:
  - Expected reward (told they'd get a certificate).
  - Unexpected reward.
  - No reward.
- A week later, they were given markers again during free play.

# Lepper, Greene & Nisbett (1973) – "Magic Marker" Study

## Result

- Those who **expected a reward** drew **less and shorter** during free time
- Their intrinsic joy of drawing dropped — it became "work"

## Takeaway

**Expected rewards** can shift motivation from internal ("I want to draw") to external ("I get something for drawing").

# Deci, Koestner & Ryan (1999) Meta-Analysis

## Goal / Assumption

Can these effects be seen consistently across many studies and tasks?

## Setup

- Reviewed **128 controlled experiments** on rewards and motivation
- Compared effects of **tangible** (money, prizes) and **verbal** (praise) rewards

# Deci, Koestner & Ryan (1999) Meta-Analysis

## Result

- **Tangible rewards** reduced intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks
- **Verbal rewards** could support motivation *if* they conveyed genuine competence
- Effects strongest in creative and problem-solving work

## Takeaway

"Carrots" work for routine tasks — but for knowledge work, they often **kill engagement and creativity.**

# How it applies to Software Development?

*It depends...*

# Software Development and incentives

- 🧠 **Science is non-conclusive** — results differ across studies 🤔
- 💰 **Incentives do have an impact**, but there's **no strong statistical proof** of a clear direction (positive or negative)
- 📋 Many studies rely on **questionnaires or lab setups**, so they reflect *what people say or feel*, not always *how they behave in real projects*
- 🎮 **Gamification gives mixed results**: it can drive focus and engagement, but may also create
  - *unhealthy competition*, or
  - *over-focus on extrinsic goals* (badges, scores, metrics)
- 💻 **Software development may not behave like pure creative work** — some studies hint it's more structured and collaborative

## References

1. [A Laboratory Experiment on Financial Incentivization in Software Engineering \(2022\)](#)
2. [A Large-Scale Survey of Motivation in Software Development \(2024\)](#)
3. [Gamification in Software Engineering \(2021\)](#)

# When "if-then" motivation works?

When task is boring, repetitive and unrewarding

- Provide rational justification, why it needed to be done
- Agree, that's "it's boring"
- Allow people to execute work the way they want to
  - Focus on expected result
  - Allow to discover "the path" toward it

# Why you should NOT motivate people:

- People are already motivated.
- Our job: stop killing it.

? *What will you stop doing?*

? *What will you start doing?*

# Thank You!

*People don't need a fire lit under them.*

*They need space so their inner fire can breathe.*