

Motivating students to work hard and get good—not because they *have to*, but because they **WANT TO!**

BAND TOGETHER

BY FRAN KICK

Here's the dilemma...

Teacher says: "I'm sick and tired of always telling these kids what to do and when to do it!"

Kids are thinking: "We're sick and tired of always being told what to do and when to do it!"

How do we get to the point where students start internalizing some sense of personal responsibility, self-motivation, and "Just do it?" Like most things in life, our individual perception greatly influences both our motivation's *content* (what actually motivates us) and *context* (how and why it motivates us). The better we understand what motivates us as individuals, the better we can help others connect to what motivates them in a lasting way.

In his book *Emotions of Normal People*, author William Marston argues that *everyone* is motivated—they're just motivated for their reasons, not yours. When parents say:

"We don't understand our kid! He's not motivated—all he wants to do is play video games," perhaps they miss the point. Their son is motivated: He's motivated to play video games!

So rather than thinking of motivation as something students either have or don't have, ask a question based on the root of the word: "What's your motive?" The answers can show that motivation isn't a "yes or no" proposition, but is more like a continuous scale with three levels.

At the bottom, students have little or no motivation. They're apathetic. Everything at this level seems to be an obligation—something they "have to" do. They only seem to respond to threats or punishments.

The middle level of motivation involves things they "get to" do. Students are motivated by opportunities or incentives. They see their level of motivation as some sort of





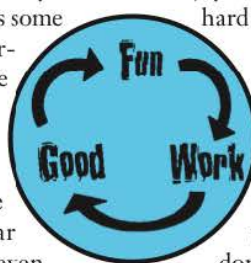
pay-off. They'll put in the work, but only if there's a reward. That attitude can be summed up by the question "What's in it for me?"

Both of these levels ("have to" and "get to") tend to be externally directed. Students require bribes or threats, carrots or sticks to "motivate them" into doing something.

But when students start to tap into the highest level—a more *internally* inspired level of motivation—their commitment increases, and so does their success.

Remember William Marston's argument that everyone's motivated for their own reasons? The things students will do on their own—without threats and without bribes, but because they want to do it—fall into this category. This self-motivation, or intrinsic motivation, differs from extrinsic motivation. It's that personal, internal, inherent, natural human tendency to do something for no other reason than the pure joy and satisfaction derived from the activity itself.

Everything we do with conscious intention has some underlying reason behind it, be it external, internal, or a mix of both. Someone might go to the gym because they're training for a competition, but others might go because they enjoy the exercise, like the endorphin rush they feel afterward, feel better about themselves when people notice their fitness, take pride in being disciplined, fear getting cut from the team—the reasons may even change over time. But their workout is usually more effective when the internal influences outweigh the external pressures.



When Work Gets Fun

Find someone who's really good at doing something. It doesn't matter what it is—sports, music, art, video games—and then ask: "How come you're so good?" More times than not, their response will be something like, "I don't know; it's just fun." They see it as a cause-and-effect relationship, rather than a process or cycle with one key element they rarely mention—work!

When you consider the amount of effort, energy, and time it took them to get good, you begin to see that they "work at it" more than most. That effort improves their ability, and as they get better, the activity becomes more fun—so much fun that they forget about the "work." And the process cycles all the way around—working hard, getting good, and having fun in the process. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who studied the psychology of happiness and creativity, once said, "Learning to enjoy the intrinsic rewards of hard work is essential to successful development."

Aristotle called this joy, experienced from pursuing excellence in a worthwhile activity, *eudaimonia*. Abraham Maslow called it "self-actualization." Csikszentmihalyi calls it the optimal experience of "flow." And I call it KICKin' IT IN! Mary Poppins may have been on to something when she said: "In every job that must be done there is an element of fun, you find the fun and snap: The job's a game!"

The musical and physical challenges of drum corps illustrate how the combination of working hard, getting good, and having fun motivates and inspires young people. No one gets past the first rehearsal because they "have to." Some may do it because they "get to." But most take part because they "want to."

In fact, when I talk to the educators who bring their students to Kick It In events, where they can see DCI groups on the field and up close, they'll often cite one main reason for excellence they're seeing and hearing: "All those kids really want to be there!" Well of course they do. It's lots of FUN! 🎺

KICK STARTERS

- See more about the concepts we've discussed at tinyurl.com/kick-it1 and tinyurl.com/kick-it2.
- The worksheet on page 24 offers two activities you can try with your own students.
- Learn how you and your students can Kick Start Your Season this summer with Fran Kick at select DCI Tour events at kickitin.com/dci

Activity #1

List one time in your life where you found yourself working hard, getting good or doing well and having fun.

Describe what made you “work hard.”

How were you “doing well?” Or what were you “getting good” at doing?

What made it “fun” for you?

Activity #2

List things in your life you feel like you...

“HAVE TO” DO...

“GET TO” DO...

“WANT TO” DO...

COMMITMENT & MOTIVATION Notice how your level of commitment and motivation increases as you move from things you “Have to” do vs. “Get to” do vs. “Want to” do?
