

Using Motivation to Improve Performance

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Do individuals who have learning goals outperform those who have approval or advancement goals? Not necessarily, it depends on the context. Different goals can exist independently within the same individual and learning goals can be greatly influenced by interest. Students interested in a specific topic would be expected to perform better, due to prior knowledge and a willingness to expend more effort.

What's the best way to motivate someone?

Most can relate to the general concept of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation: being motivated to do something because of internal reasons (your personal interest and enjoyment) or because of external reasons (consequences resulting from your actions). Consequences have been defined in psychological terms as positive (something given) and negative (something taken away) reinforcements and punishments. This may seem confusing, but reinforcements and punishments serve two different functions: **Reinforcements** increase behaviors (strengthen a response), whereas **punishments** decrease behaviors (weaken a response). For example:

You perform well and receive something desirable like praise or money.

(Positive Reinforcement)

You perform well and have something undesirable removed like anxiety or debt.

(Negative Reinforcement)

You perform poorly and receive something undesirable like criticism or extra work.

(Positive Punishment)

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You perform poorly and lose something desirable like status or opportunity.

(Negative Punishment)

In beauty school, where students attend voluntarily for vocational training, students may not perceive a strong link between their present behavior and their future success. In a pass/no pass evaluation system, do students perform the bare minimum or try to excel? What's the point if students receive the same proof of training upon completion of the curriculum hours?

How much effort will students expend where there's no fear of failure?

In an article titled "[In Praise of the F Word](#)," Mary Sherry encouraged educators to use the possibility of failure, the threat of flunking, as a teaching and motivational tool: "Passing students who have not mastered the work cheats them and the employers who expect graduates to have basic skills." Sherry was describing high school students, but the same reasoning could apply to beauty school students.

Ideally, educators should emphasize the value of instruction and reinforce committed engagement.

Trying to increase intrinsic motivation by minimizing social competition, employing alternative methods of assessment and reducing the use of extrinsic rewards for achievement ignores individual differences in students and their potential to adapt. According to their influential [Self-Determination Theory](#) of motivation, psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci emphasize the basic need for control, competence and connection, and offer [this advice](#):

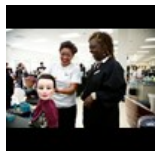
"Frankly speaking, because many of the tasks that educators want their students to perform are not inherently interesting or enjoyable, knowing how to promote more active and volitional (versus passive and controlling) forms of extrinsic motivation becomes an essential strategy for successful teaching."

Giving students more control over their learning experiences and outcomes shifts the responsibility where it belongs.

If you'd like to share your experience and be featured in a future column, please email me at jaime@precisionnails.com.

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