**AFP Book Club: A Conversation with Author Daniel Pink on Motivation**

* By Ira Apfel Published:September 3, 2010

What motivates people? It's not always money, or even praise. So says Dan Pink, author of the best-selling book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. A former political speechwriter and contributor to *Harvard Business Review*, Pink is a keynote speaker at AFP's upcoming Annual Conference in November. Pink recently spoke to *Exchange* magazine.

**Exchange:** What got you interested in writing about motivation as a topic?

**Daniel Pink:** Well, I guess the real end to this was a book that I wrote a few years ago called A Whole New Mind, and that book argued that we're moving from a world built around these less framed, logical, linear, sequential abilities to one built more around the artistic, emphatic, big picture right-brain abilities. And people who had read that said, well, okay, this might be right but if it's true then how do we motivate people to do those sorts of things? And I didn't have a clue. But I did know there was a large body of research on motivation so I started looking at it and I realized first that it was a huge body of research, and second that it said some very surprising things that it in many ways called into question orthodoxies that I didn't even realize were orthodoxies.

**Exchange:** Such as?

**Daniel Pink:** Such as the way to get people to perform at a higher level is to reward the behavior you want and punish the behavior you don't want. That's true in some cases but actually, it's true in a surprisingly narrow band of circumstances and it's becoming less and less true as people do more sophisticated work.

**Exchange:** You note in Drive that there's a wide body of knowledge about this and yet it seems like everyone is still rewarding the good behavior. Why do people cling to that?

**Daniel Pink:** I think there are a few reasons why businesses tend to cling to this style of motivation even in the face of evidence that it doesn't work very well. I think one is that it's how we've always done things and people, human beings -- myself included -- are often resistant to change. There's a certain inertia that takes over and so if you've only done things one way, it's sometimes hard to be doing it another way.

The second thing is that these carrot and stick motivators or as I call them if-then motivators as in if you do this then you get that, they actually produce something in the short run. I mean if you offer people a very high stakes reward and say I want you to come up with a new product idea and if anybody comes up with a new product, you get $10,000. People are going to respond to that. They're going to work. And so I think that managers get faked out a little bit because they see people moving and acting, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're doing anything worthwhile.

And the third part is that they're easy. If you look at what I think truly motivates people or not even what I think, what the science thinks, truly motivates people for creative and complex work, it's hard stuff. It's giving people a sense of autonomy. It's infusing things with a sense of purpose. That's really hard. It's much easier to say I'll give you $10,000 for doing something great and then go back to your office.

**Exchange:** How does one measure autonomy and allowing for creativity?

**Daniel Pink:** It's a really important point and there are two dimensions of that. The first is, as you say, it's that if you look at something like autonomy, it actually is a very difficult to measure.

The thing though is that what we have to keep in mind is that in business, obviously, we're still measuring results. We still want outcomes and these things, autonomy, mastery, and purpose, these elements of this new approach to motivation are an avenue to perform it. And the companies that are doing the really interesting things, these seemingly radical things, they're still measuring performance and then people still have to deliver. There's still accountability. It's just that autonomy is the pathway to accountability. They're measured on the results; they're not measured on the input.

**Exchange:** How can people who perform routine tasks such as providing reports to their superiors and the like, how can they find self-motivation? How can people who supervise these staff members motivate them if so much is routinized?

**Daniel Pink:** I think it's a really important question. I guess I would step back and wonder how much of the data they work is truly routine. I'm sure that the part of it is, and in that case, I think the question is in some ways twin in the sense that the self-motivation and work and motivation from your bosses run on basically the same track for these more mundane tasks. I think it's very important that people are able to do them, have sovereignty control, autonomy over how they do it.

Now again, there are certain kinds of tasks where following this actual team itself is essential to delivering their result and there, you actually can't deviate too much. But what you really want is a result then you have to get people autonomy over their technique, some amount of autonomy over their time.

The second thing is that I think a lot of times even for routine work, one reason that people find it in some ways alienating and so forth is not only the substance of the day-to-day stuff, but they don't necessarily see how it contributes to the larger enterprise. And I think that what individuals can do is take a step back periodically and think about, okayOK, so why am I doing this? How does this contribute to the larger enterprise of this company?

If folks are managing people who are doing less incredibly, inherently, automatically, interesting and autonomous work is that they can infuse what they do with a sense of purpose and a sense of context and explain to people what they're doing in a day-to-day level contributes to the larger whole. The more that someone who's leading people and managing people can put an individual's work in context and still hammer how it contributes, how it matters in the totality of things -- that can be very, very effective.

And the other thing is to the extent that it's possible is help people make progress in what they're doing. This is really the case on the manager's side; help people make progress in what they're doing; help people get a little bit better at what they're doing. Maybe over time move them to more challenging things. That is, if people have a sense of forward progress, if they get a sense that they're getting a little bit better at something that itself could be very motivating.

**Exchange:** What about CFOs and other members of the C-suite, is it motivation enough for them to be highly paid and not have to resort to these daily routine tasks?

**Daniel Pink:** The problem is that a motivator like money, the motivational energy in it is fairly rapidly depleted. I'll give you one example of this. This is my proprietary algorithm for how to short a stock. If you go in to a company and you look around, particularly in the C-suite but throughout the company and look at people's computers and see whether they have the company's stock price open in a little window on that computer, if they do then that's the company that you should short, the company where money has become too salient and people have focused on the stock price and on the money and not on doing the work.

The other thing is that if you look at the really good corporate leaders, they're people who have a sense of purpose, they're people who think that what they're doing actually matters, that what their company's doing actually contributes to the world, and not in a kind of completely high-minded sense of we're solving the climate crisis and we're ending world hunger. But they're delivering a product or service that matters in people's lives, it makes people's lives better, they're creating jobs, they're doing something valuable. And I think that these leaders who are all about the bonus and the money are less effective than those who have a broader view, both a view of what the enterprise is about and have a longer term view as well.

*Hear the entire interview at* [*www.AFPonline.org/podcast*](http://www.afponline.org/podcast) *or see Daniel Pink at the AFP Annual Conference, Nov. 7-10 in San Antonio:* [*www.afponline.org/annual*](http://www.afponline.org/annual)

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