*The most effective incentive on the planet? It's not a pile of cash, praise or gold stars. There's a far more powerful motivation, says Daniel H. Pink, the guy who* [*turned Oprah on to the power of right-brain thinking*](http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Oprah-Talks-to-Daniel-Pink)*, and he's not talking about denial or punishment, either. Scientists are discovering a far more powerful third drive. To tap into it, you need to develop three things: a sense of mastery, autonomy and purpose. Here's how...*

**1. Discover Your Reservoir of Grit**  
The thirst for mastery is akin to the thirst for water. It keeps the soul alive. So what is the best way to cultivate a sense to accomplishment? An interesting answer recently came from a group of researchers studying new cadets at West Point to understand why some students dropped out. All the recruits were talented, but the successful students shared a certain quality: grit. Everyone has a reservoir of grit, though you can't tap it for a random endeavor. (There's a reason Dara Torres didn't become an accountant. As a kid, she was willing to swim 2000 yards at 5 a.m.—not balance her mom's checkbook.) To figure out where your reservoir of grit is, ask yourself: "What would I do for free?" Or: "What I'd really like to be doing now is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_." The answers point you toward areas where you'll naturally persevere—and improve.   
  
**2. Figure Out Where You Can Be Your Own Boss**  
We come into this world curious and self-directed—just look at any toddler—but we can become passive and inert in mundane situations, like when we're stuck on the low end of the office totem pole or in the cook/housecleaner/chauffeur role at home. Two business school professors, however, found that people in the least-empowered positions can develop a sense of autonomy. They studied the performance of hospital cleaners, and found that those who went beyond doing the minimum job requirements—chatting with patients or helping make nurses' tasks go more smoothly—reported an increase in job satisfaction. By reframing their duties, the janitors helped make their work more fully their own. This isn't just about taking on more responsibilities. It's about exploring what you can do differently to make your role, whatever it is, more interesting. If you reframe "I have to go the grocery store" to "I'm a player in the worldwide supply chain for food"—okay, no one but a nerd like me will do that—but you could choose to see how your choice of eggs can affect a larger system. Or you can make a game of it and see how fast you can get in and out of there. Either way, you're not at the mercy of a to-do list; you've taken control (if only in a small way) of your time, efforts and responsibilities.   
  
**3. Find Your Sentence**  
Seeking purpose is part of how we're wired—by doing something that endures, we prove that we were here, that we mattered. Clare Boothe Luce once told John F. Kennedy, "A great man is one sentence. Abraham Lincoln's was 'He preserved the Union and freed the slaves.' What's yours?" If you can't seem to access your purpose in life, I've found the best place to start is with Luce's question.