



Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation

By Edward L. Deci, Richard Flaste

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What motivates us as students, employees, and individuals?

If you reward your children for doing their homework, they will usually respond by getting it done. But is this the most effective method of motivation? No, says psychologist Edward L. Deci, who challenges traditional thinking and shows that this method actually works *against* performance. The best way to motivate people—at school, at work, or at home—is to support their sense of autonomy. Explaining the reasons why a task is important and then allowing as much personal freedom as possible in carrying out the task will stimulate interest and commitment, and is a much more effective approach than the standard system of reward and punishment. We are all inherently interested in the world, argues Deci, so why not nurture that interest in each other? Instead of asking, "How can I motivate people?" we should be asking, "How can I create the conditions within which people will motivate themselves?"

"An insightful and provocative meditation on how people can become more genuinely engaged and successful in pursuing their goals." —*Publisher's Weekly*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Univ. of Rochester psychology professor Deci and Flaste, former science and health editor for the New York Times, here compile decades of experimentation and research on human motivation conducted by Deci and his colleagues. The product is an insightful and provocative meditation on how people can become more genuinely engaged and successful in pursuing their goals?in school, the workplace and relationships. Concerned with what makes people want to succeed, Deci conducted extensive studies demonstrating that when subjects are encouraged to pursue a task for its own sake, they do it better and enjoy it more than those told to do it for a reward or informed that they will be punished if they don't do it correctly. These results lead to his conclusion?amply illustrated through anecdotal and scholarly evidence?that authoritarian motivational strategies such as the reward/punishment systems commonly used in American schools and businesses alienate people from their work, make them less productive and leave them less fulfilled. Deci calls for "autonomy-supportive" behavior from those in positions of authority to encourage motivation emanating from within.

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About the Author

Edward L. Deci, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, is director of its human motivation program.

Richard Flaste, former Science and Health Editor of **The New York Times**, led the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1987.

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