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Book Review - Drive: The Truth About What Motivates Us

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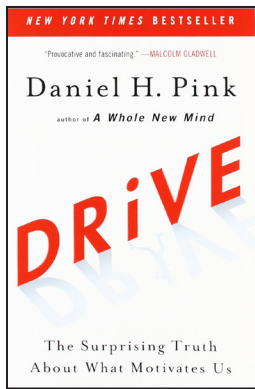
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Drive: The Truth About What Motivates Us

By: Daniel H. Pink

Review by Wyatt Pagano

As a “starving student” in college I was always attracted by opportunities to make more money. At the time, I felt confident that I could do anything and be happy doing it for an extra \$1.50 an hour. This makes sense when a person is struggling to pay the rent and trying to eat more than instant ramen noodles in their diet. After marrying and settling into a life with more financial stability, that all changed. I began caring more than ever about my professional pursuits, and Daniel Pink’s book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* helped me understand why.

According to Pink, the main source of motivation in human beings is intrinsic, meaning it comes from internal forces. Each of us finds the greatest motivation to complete a task when the joy of the task is reward enough. Furthermore, the degree of creativity and excellence is greater than when faced with extrinsic motivators like money. In fact, studies show that money is often a toxic de-motivator that decreases creativity and encourages undesirable behavior. This is why fewer people donate blood when offered compensation and why non-commissioned artwork is objectively rated more beautiful than commissioned work (pg. 46, 63). Money is still important, but after people are paid enough to take the issue of money off the table, it ceases to be productive. Ultimately, Pink asserts that people are motivated most by three elements of work:

Autonomy | Mastery | Purpose

Autonomy at work provides individuals with the chance to direct their work and exercise some degree of control over their situation. Something about this type of self-direction stimulates the creative juices and intrinsically motivates human beings with a desire to work hard. A sense of ownership is highly rewarding, as many companies are finding out. Did you know that Gmail, Google Translate, and Google News were all the result of autonomous projects done by Google employees outside of their normal work responsibilities (pg. 94)? Programmers at Google and at other companies are given time during their week to work on whatever projects they want that are related to their profession. The result of this autonomy has been highly creative production. Autonomy clearly offers motivation to do and be our very best.

Mastery is the process by which people work to become experts in their field. Individuals also have an innate desire to be really, really good at what they do. People find joy in overcoming challenges and gaining as much mastery as possible over different subjects. This is natural. Think of a time where you started a job and had no idea what to do. As time went by and you increased your capabilities and skills and became good at your job, you probably felt an immense sense of satisfaction. The feeling of progress is a natural high that is hard to compete with. As a student, school was always more enjoyable when I felt that I grew in my abilities and mastered difficult concepts.

Purpose constitutes the reason we engage in a line of work. The “triple bottom line” is a term becoming more familiar in the business world. Millennials crave work that is meaningful and impactful, and they aren’t the only ones. Even baby boomers are influencing this shift in business culture (pg 132). When people have a “why” to the work they do, they will accomplish more than they otherwise would. Purpose is an essential element of motivation, and money is not a sufficient purpose in today’s professional world. Devotion to a cause greater than oneself has a way of drawing forth a person’s best efforts and creativity.

Conclusion

Considering my own experiences, I found that Pink's book was right on the money; that is, money is not the best motivator. My best work in school or work has consistently sprung from situations where I was self-directed, mastering new skills, and had a higher purpose in mind that required the best of me. A room full of autonomous people, working towards mastery, for a purpose greater than themselves, is a room ready to change the world. Business leaders would do well to recognize the shift and embrace the opportunity to be more efficient and more creative than ever before. Although contrary to the conventional wisdom, Daniel Pink's doctrine may just offer the seeds of salvation for businesses seeking to attract and retain the best talent.

Notes

Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2009.

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