



8 Ways To Fuel Your Students' Intrinsic Motivation

Most students are praised too much.

They're praised too often, too public, and too over-the-top. They're praised for things any reasonable person would conclude are simply not worthy of it.

And as the bar of excellence drops lower and lower, it squeezes the work ethic right out of our students.

Sure, they smile and blush over their teacher's enthusiastic backslapping. They hold up their pretty certificates for the camera and smooth stickers on the bumper of the family car.

But **unless the praise was earned, it means nothing**. And deep down every student knows it.

For every time you praise students for something that didn't involve hard work or a certain mental toughness to accomplish, a sliver of their dignity is taken from them.

A soft, sinister voice whispers, *"Pssst! Hey, you in the third row. Yeah, you with the smiley face sticker. You know you didn't really earn it, don't you? Your teacher just gave it to you because average is all you're capable of."*

When a teacher refrains from giving praise for doing what is expected, however, and instead keeps her eyes peeled for true accomplishment, she adds a jolt of fuel to her students' intrinsic motivation.

For this kind of praise feeds the churning, unstoppable force that resides in each student and spurs them on to become more than they thought they could.

A triumphant voice then shouts from the mountaintops, *"You did it! And you're capable of so much more!"*

Here are eight ways to give your students intrinsic power through your effective praise.

1. Make it deserved.

Unless the praise you offer is based on achievement, which is defined differently for each student, then it will hold no meaning or have lasting effect. This underscores the importance of knowing your students and their unique abilities – so that when you see something praiseworthy, you can pounce.

2. Make it subtle.

Small, subtle gestures of praise are among the most effective. Mere eye contact from across the room, carefully timed, one-word recognition, a single nod of the head – they can send a student's internal motivation into hyper drive.

3. Make it private.

Make your praise a privately shared moment between you and the student. It may seem counterintuitive, but you'll find exclusive praise to have more intrinsic value and greater motivational effect on your students than the over-the-top, public, cheering variety.

4. Make it silent.

You don't always have to make your praise wordless, but doing so can make it especially effective. Quiet applause, fist pumps, winks, knowing smiles, and good old-fashioned handshakes are all wonderful and inherently genuine ways to jump-start your students' intrinsic engines.

5. Make it written.

A stationery note, written in your careful hand, folded over and stuck to the inside of a student's desk is perhaps **the most effective form of praise you could ever use**. If your note is written from the heart, the student will cherish your words – not sharing it with a soul and saving it for years.

6. Make it belated.

Effective praise doesn't have to come immediately following the accomplishment. Sometimes it's best to wait until your praise can be more confidential and unexpected. An out-of-the-blue compliment about which the student didn't even know you noticed can be especially impactful.

7. Make it on potential.

Praise based on untapped ability can provide a much-needed kick in the shorts. When you *know* a student can perform better than he is showing,

give it to him straight. *“As smart as you are, you should be getting A’s on your math tests.”* Coming from a trusted source like an admired teacher, he’ll believe it—and be changed by it.

8. Make it joyous.

Yes, there are times that call for joyous, enthusiastic celebration. But the key here is that it’s genuine and that it fits the situation. These spontaneous moments are also best shared with a group of students or, better yet, your entire class.

Not Without Praise

Just as important as it is to eschew false praise, it’s equally important not to let a good work pass without your acknowledgement. Worthy praise is the answer to motivating individual students and getting them to move in the direction you want.

But you can’t withhold it.

If you witness them stepping beyond what are common expectations and into the realm of true accomplishment, don’t let them hang there on the vine unnoticed, where the fruit of excellence withers and dies.

Let them know you noticed. Give them your authentic, intrinsically targeted approval. You’ll be amazed at what they’re capable of.

More than you ever dreamed.

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