

Introduction

Motivation is a personal business. It is appropriate therefore to start a book on motivation with an explanation of my personal motivation.

My interest in motivation was triggered when, as a parent, I found myself struggling to motivate my 10-year-old and 8-year-old sons to take up the guitar. I'll never forget catching myself saying: 'That guitar is getting thrown out in the morning and that's £100 I've wasted.' After six years' training in psychology and twenty years' experience as a psychologist, the only way I knew how to motivate my sons was to try to make them feel guilty.

I realized then I knew little about motivation. I had been working in education too long! I knew how to control, manipulate, reward and punish pupils but I did not know how to motivate them. That came as a bit of a shock to a psychologist who was supposed to know about motivation.

Around the same time, I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with behavioural models of school discipline. I had done a lot of work over many previous years on promoting positive behaviour and felt we had taken that paradigm as far as we could.

This personal experience as a father also made me realize that self-motivation had been a lifelong personal interest. I am the youngest of six children. When I was 16 I was the first person in my family to sit national examinations. In fact I was the only person in my street in a Glasgow housing estate to be studying for exams. It was this that got me interested in psychology, to find out what made me different from the rest of my family and friends, particularly what made me motivated to work hard at school. As you can see exploring self-motivation has been something of a lifelong quest.

I have been working on developing my model of motivation for 10 years. In that time I have had many setbacks in trying to make sense of it and communicate it to teachers and others in an accessible and practical way. This journey has been like raising a child, a journey of emotional highs and lows where, no matter what, I could never give up. I hope my obstinacy and persistence has paid off.

One of my sons has, at the age of 17 decided to start learning to play the guitar. Maybe patience is necessary for those of us who seek to motivate.

