

Book Reviews by Ian Robertson



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Title: *Drive*
Author: Daniel Pink
First Edition: Penguin (2009)
Reviewed: April 2013



Drive is a thoughtful, thought-provoking, and engaging book that will be of interest to everyone. It combines the best features of a book challenging the status quo such as an academic foundation free of intimidating buzzwords; clear writing; logical structure; and a message that is concise, entertaining, and educational.

Rating:



Out of 5 Stars

The book is divided into three parts: a challenge to the commonly held notion and practice that we are motivated by a carrot and stick approach; an explanation of the three forces which really do drive us (autonomy, mastery and purpose); and a “toolkit” offering a broad range of practical advice. The summary concluding the three sections is very clever and effective.

Mr. Pink starts by explaining that three forces drive our behaviour: biological (e.g. hunger); rewards and punishments; and a third force, well known to science but not to business or the public, called “intrinsic motivation.” Historically, once our biological needs were satisfied, we organised our work lives for structural efficiency, employing carrot and stick incentives.

The fundamental problem with the current incentive system is that, although it can be effective for routine or repetitive activities such as Henry Ford’s assembly lines, it is not well suited to more complex jobs. Because our tasks are more complex – no longer are we trying to increase the number of rivets per hour in a car door – the carrot and stick approach can distort outcomes, lead to unethical behaviour, or foster short-term thinking, as we have recently seen in the financial sector. Worse, they do little to address the inherent satisfaction we feel from a job well done. Pink contends that to be effective in our modern economy, business needs to concern “itself less with the external rewards an activity brings and more with the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself.”

Specifically, he identifies three elements needed to shift workers to be more productive. First, we need autonomy over tasks, time, team members, and technique. Second, we need mastery of our work. This requires us to see our abilities as improvable and requires effort, deliberate practice, and recognition that we will never actually quite achieve perfection. Third, we need purpose, “goals that use profit to reach purpose”, an emphasis on more than self-interest, and the ability to pursue the goals in our own ways.

Pay, we learn, is related more strongly to the first two types of drive (biological and behaviour/reward), and above a certain threshold, the inherent rewards of a job well done become more and more important. Pink notes that “people who are very high in extrinsic goals for wealth are more likely to attain that wealth, but they are still unhappy.” Charles Dickens knew this intuitively when he wrote *A Christmas Carol*, but Daniel Pink explains why, and offers a legible prescription for curing what ails the system.

Daniel Pink has the final word. “The science shows that the secret to high performance isn’t our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive – our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to make a contribution.”