

This article originally appeared on Time.com.

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010

## Q&A

### Author Daniel Pink

By Kristi Oloffson

Motivating people by dangling money in front of them doesn't always work. Nor do a host of other traditional business incentives. Instead, argues Daniel Pink, an author who worked as a speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore, people are often fueled by intrinsic motivations — like the simple desire to do good work. To prove his point, Pink penned *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, which hit stores Dec. 29. Pink talked with TIME about what fuels good work, the perils of performance reviews and what businesses can do to boost performance in a tough economic climate.

#### **Did your thesis change as the recession evolved?**

The recession validated some of the arguments. One reason that the economy ran off the rails was because of these high-stakes rewards for short-term payoffs. When that went on for too long, it ended up having collateral consequences on the whole economy.

#### **Do you think intrinsic motivators are stronger than external rewards?**

I think they're more important for creative, conceptual tasks. If-then motivators — if you do this, then you get that — are really good for routine algorithmic tasks. The problem is fewer of us are doing that kind of work. Now, that doesn't mean that we stop paying people. Intrinsic motivators are clearly the primary root to high performance. In the world of behavioral science that's not even controversial; the idea just hasn't migrated to business.

#### **How do you explain the greed on Wall Street if you are arguing that extrinsic motivators aren't as powerful?**

People respond to incentives in their environment. They take the low road sometimes. They take shortcuts and sacrifice the long term for the sake of the short term. We have the reward-and-punishment drive, absolutely. My argument is that science shows we

also have that third drive [of doing something because of inherent satisfaction]. If we neglect the third drive, we're leaving huge amounts of talent on the table.

### **Are autonomous workers as productive?**

I think that most people will perform better under conditions of autonomy than they do under conditions of heavy control. What I would recommend for companies today is to [set aside] 10% time — essentially, one afternoon a week where employees can work on anything they want, and you do it for six months. Everybody I know, including myself, has squandered one afternoon a week.

### **Why has it taken so long for employers to acknowledge this?**

There's this idea that people need to be monitored, that if you let them have any kind of autonomy they're going to slack off. I think that for a lot of people, that's just not the case. And when you start introducing these kinds of controlling, if-then rewards on something that people like to do and want to do, it ends up actually extinguishing their interest in it.

### **What are some practical ways businesses can improve performance?**

The do-it-yourself performance review. I have not encountered a single person who thinks performance reviews are useful, valuable or enjoyable. They take place too infrequently. If you want feedback on something, you want it pretty quickly, rather than six months later. At the end of the month, call yourself into your office, and give yourself an appraisal. How are you doing? Where are you falling short? People want to know how they're doing and I think we can assess that ourselves.

Another free exercise is to gather your team, give everybody a blank 3-by-5 card, and have everyone write down the organization's purpose. In some places you're going to have people pretty aligned on a common purpose. In other places, 35 employees will think the company has 35 different purposes. Or worse, 31 of 35 employees will have no idea what the purpose of this organization is.

### **How do you stay optimistic about business and companies' abilities to change with record-high unemployment?**

We tend to get faked out sometimes by the particular moment that we're living in, whether it's a boom or a bust. If you take three steps backward, you'll realize that the trajectory of things is generally positive. It's not in one smooth upward slope. It involves some pain along the way. But in general, the future is better than the past.

