

Activate Inner Motivation to Learn

The desire to learn comes from the inside out. Inner motivation is the only effective lasting inspiration. Research points to at least four key, underlying conditions that release inner motivation and inspire adults to become lifelong life-learners. The interconnection of all four accelerates learning in adults (“*Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*” by Wlodkoski).

1. Relevance: *Demonstrating value by relating learning to life:* A desire to find meaning is fundamental to humanity. Adult learners in particular dislike busywork. Adults need to know the reason for learning something. Visualizing what they want may help release the intrinsic motivation bottled up inside. So relate learning to life. God’s image-bearers are active beings who desire to shape the course of our lives in relevant ways. *First*, create thoughtful and challenging learning experiences *within the group* that tap into the rich perspectives, exquisite variety, and deep-seated values of adult learners. Such an environment where meaning-making roams about promiscuously is the source of surprising new births. *Second*, this fluid learning community stimulates personal, relevant responses that propel learning *out of* the formal classroom into significant arenas of our real-life experiences, connecting truth with daily life. God’s people possess a strong need to apply what we have learned in our concrete and real world. We cannot respond to life and remain unchanged. As we bring these experiences back to the group, this releases life and learning in others.



2. Joy & Fun: *Nurturing positive attitudes towards learning:* Our attitude predisposes us in a certain direction, positively or negatively. Particularly since many western Christians have negative past experiences with learning, positive, realistic expectations are essential at the beginning. Encourage in one another a favorable outlook towards learning, which often comes as a playful sense of joy and expectancy is re-introduced. Provide a

basis for hope. Inward motivation is released when learners see that what is coming will be valuable to them. Without this expectation, their will to take ownership and to learn rusts shut. With this belief, learners will make the indispensable choices to put out full effort, leading to active buy-in and ownership, which in turn is a key to learning. Adults need to take responsibility for their learning. Regardless of what they might add as imperfect learners, every member is vital, like each part of a body. Communicate unqualified acceptance and a strong belief in their capacity as lifelong life-learners designed in the image of the Trinity.

3. Belonging: *Connecting with each other accelerates growth:* Creating an environment in which both the learners and teachers feel respected and connected to one another develops a relaxed, stimulating place to learn. Cooperation is the norm for learning since we are social beings. As a community of learners, as mutually-accepting, encircling partners, we care as much about the learning of our peers as we do about our own learning. Perhaps on the horizontal plane, nothing is quite as powerful as community. When we respond with authenticity from the center of who we really are, our desire to make sense of things and search out our full range of capacities grows. This fluid, playful, inclusive collaboration with one another develops a different relationship with discovery, frees us to tell our 1st-person story, enhances retention, opens up rich possibilities for relevant action, and maximizes growth as we become influence-able influencers.

4. Competence: *Experiencing growing competence in skills, values, and/or character powerfully motivates learning:* As image-bearers, God created us to rule...to explore, perceive, evaluate, think about and change our surroundings like a thermostat to promote positive effects. We want to matter! Growing competence taps into our God-given yearning to count, to experience significance. Learning something valued is the single most powerful motivation for adult learners. This makes the process pleasurable and desirable...and fun! Success cultivates expectancy for continued success to improve skills, values and character. Successful learning drives us to learn more. So early-on in the process, encourage incremental, easy-to-learn, “quick-hits” success in crucial leverage points.

“*Each one teach one,*” approaching community learning as both a learner and as a teacher. When information is willingly shared, not just accumulated or hoarded, this inspires learning. *Each one teach one* as one learner in community shares a positive experience.

So each member is equally responsible for the group as a whole. How can you integrate these four key motivational factors more deeply into this learning community?

- your attitude toward learning;
- community learning;
- relevance to your life, and
- growing competence in skills or character.

Stop now and ask yourself, “*Why are these four key ingredients so important to recapture healthy learning?*” How do these four keys interact? Solid learning theory is behind how Jesus taught and what we are attempting to reproduce in these interactive groups. Many of these insights are spot-on from this current practitioner as we release learning from within (Green and Stellman, *Head First PMP*, p. xxvi.). Soak in these. Buy-in to this kind of learning.

- “*Make learning visual.*” Images are far more memorable than words alone. Studies show that we think in pictures, one reason Jesus used so many word-pictures as He taught, like in the parables. Think pictorially. Fire up our God-given, sanctified imaginations. For instance, imagine you are in the parable, hearing the sounds and smelling the aromas. Imagery goes beyond the intellect through the emotions into the imagination. Imagination informs our intellect, ignites our emotions with hope, and unchains our will to respond as disciples, even in tough times.
- “*Touch the emotions.*” Our emotions must scream to our brain, “This is ‘can’t forget’ stuff” with what is clear and crucial. Also, we remember what we care about. An environment of fun, freewheeling, interactive spontaneity and an uncritical exchange centered around what is essential to life releases natural learning.
- “*Learn in a conversational and personalized style.*” Recent studies show a 40% increase in post-learning retention with a more conversational style. This conversational style is a natural outworking of learning through interactive dialog.
- “*As a lifelong life-learner, think more deeply.*” Unless we

as learners actively flex the neurons in our brains, nothing much happens in our heads. Many people have stopped inquiring! They bring their own thick filters to learning, seeing only what they have always seen. How can we help ourselves and others to maintain an attitude of becoming *lifelong life-learners*? Recognize we don't know it all...in any subject. Engage. Be curious. Ask questions (at least in our own minds), drawing conclusions and putting old information together in new ways.

There is a “*chaos*” to creativity. Creativity is not something rare or neat or packaged in an orderly way. Creativity is messy. Flashes of insight come at inconvenient times. It's enhanced by a fun, freewheeling, fast-paced, uncritical exchange in a cooperative group that is very “right-brained” in its earlier stages. Release the unbridled creativity of everyone. Involved learners increase the neurons that fire.

Approach with a desire to learn. The more openness, even if mixed with a bit of skepticism, the more accurate insights. We first temporarily lay down our preconceptions. *Inquire* into the truth in the passage. Approach with fresh eyes. Draw life from Scripture. Then pick up your views and values again and compare and contrast what you just learned with what you had previously believed. Discard the outdated. Hang on tightly to what stands the test of scrutiny, and *advocate* for it with integrity.

Imagine a learning environment where we can freely brainstorm together with people we trust over what is essential for life, what taps into our mutual destinies. I wonder if you can feel the insights, LifeChange and *fun* this releases, natural learning at its best.

In the cattle country of the Western US, the cattlemen began to build barbed wire fences to keep their cattle in. Which do you think was more necessary to build a strong fence, solid fence posts or wire strung between the poles? Of course, *both!* Our times together drive the fence posts in deeply and secure while you each string wire between the posts during the week. *Both/And.*

Do you believe it? Scripture is...

more precious than gold, than much pure gold (Ps 19:10).